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The World's Leading Mystery Magazine

ELLERY QUEEN'S
Mystery Magazine

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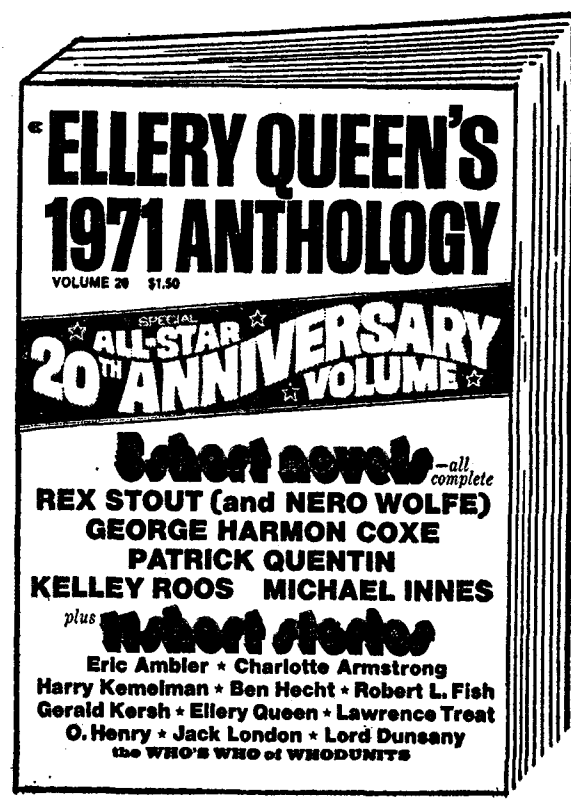

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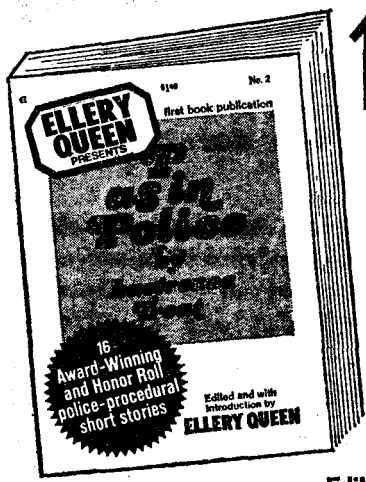

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GIDEON AND THE PIGEON

by J. J. MARRIC (John Creasey)

JIMMY MORRIS WAS TERRIfied. He had never been in the hands of the police before, never committed a crime before. Now policemen swarmed everywhere. One stood towering over him as he sat, pale and shaking, on a chair in the corner of the jeweler's shop. Another waited by the door leading to the street, near the place where the injured man had lain. Two plainclothes detectives, one red-haired and hard-looking, the other fair and plump, were by the smashed glass of the window.

If only he had never thrown that brick!

Two more policemen pointed cameras at the broken window, and at the watches, rings, clocks, and jewelry that littered the floor. The cameras clicked and flashed. A baldheaded man was brushing powder over a section of the long glass counter.

Jimmy felt like a very small mouse, cowering among the paws of giant cats.

He could hear, from the street, the noise of passing traffic, but the stretch of pavement in front

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of the jewelry store had been cordoned off, and there were no footsteps except those of the two policemen on guard outside. A few minutes ago a shiny white ambulance had screeched to a halt at the front door, and he had watched the stretcher bearers push the injured man into it.

Was he dead?

If he was dead, it would be murder.

Jimmy felt his lips quivering, in fear, in shame, in remorse.

The telephone rang, and he jumped. The red-haired policeman walked quickly behind the counter and plucked the instrument from its cradle.

"Smedley's," he said quietly. His tone was even. He might almost have been a shop assistant answering a customer's inquiry. Then Jimmy saw his manner change, heard a new note of respect in his voice. "Yes, sir... Yes, I'll see that's done. Very good, sir."

He hung up, then turned to the others. "Gideon himself. He'll be here in half an hour. He wants everything finished by the time he arrives."

Gideon? Who was Gideon?

Although Jimmy did not know, he was immediately aware of the effect of the name. The men in uniform and the plainclothes detectives suddenly began to hurry, almost to hustle. Jimmy shivered. What kind of ogre was this man Gideon who could scare even *these* men? The officer standing over him spoke to the one at the door.

"The Commander of the C.I.D. Ever seen him?"

"Twice."

"Third time unlucky. You know something?"

"What?"

"Gee-Gee wouldn't come unless it was murder."

Murder! Dear God, what madness had he got into?

As minute by minute ticked slowly by, Jimmy Morris, slight, frail for his 16 years, battled with the urge to burst into hysterical tears. He hadn't *meant* this to happen. Didn't they *know* that he hadn't meant it? His lips trembled.

The policemen glanced at him and fell silent.

Someone was chalking an outline on the floor, in the shape of a sprawled body. That was where the manager of the jewelry store had fallen, after he had been struck. To Jimmy Morris it was as if he were still lying there, the blood still trickling from his forehead.

The baldheaded fingerprint expert drew back from the counter. "Well, *I've* finished, anyway."

"So have we," said the photographers, obviously with relief.

Jimmy moistened his lips, pushed his hands into his pockets, then pulled them out again. His

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hands felt hot and clammy. No one took any notice of him, but a certain edginess was shown by the way all the men kept glancing toward the street. This Gideon must be a terrible person.

Suddenly a voice called out, "Here he is."

Jimmy started, twisted round, and stared out of the window as a long-nosed car drew up and one of the policemen on guard hurried to the rear door of the car. After a moment a man's gray head and broad shoulders appeared; the next moment the man was standing by the side of the car, looking toward the store.

He was very big. Something in his expression, seen at a distance, was forbidding, almost fearsome. His face looked as if it had been hewn out of rough, brown-colored rock, and his eyes shone very brightly. When he moved it was with a deliberate manner, as if he meant to push everything out of his way.

He appeared at the front door, paused, looked down at the floor, then stared about him. Jimmy shivered, stirring miserably in his seat as that penetrating gaze reached him. It lingered, then passed on. One of the officers moved forward.

"Good morning, sir."

"Morning, Chief Inspector." Gideon's voice was deep but, unexpectedly, not frightening. "How are things going?"

"I think we're on top of them," the Chief Inspector said cautiously. "Everything's done here; all we have to do now is size 'em up and catch 'em."

"You still think it's the Castleton gang?"

"Pretty certain, sir. Same tricks, same pattern, and the seventh job in five weeks."

"That's why I wanted to see for myself," said Gideon. "So you're pretty certain, huh?" Without actually saying so, he gave the impression that this wasn't good enough. Turning toward the chalked outline on the floor, he rubbed his chin slowly, pensively. The Chief Inspector asked the question burning in Jimmy's mind.

"How's the victim, sir?"

"Being operated on," answered Gideon. He moved away, studying prints and scratches through a magnifying glass, aloof, unperturbed, noncommittal. Jimmy Morris wanted to close his eyes, but couldn't. This man seemed to mesmerize him; but then, he appeared to have the same effect on everyone else.

Suddenly Gideon swung round toward Jimmy and moved closer. Jimmy had never before been stared at so closely, never before felt as if he were under a microscope. Then quite unexpectedly the strong, stern face broke into a smile.

"Didn't know what you were

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letting yourself in for, Morris, did you?"

Jimmy stammered, "No—n-n-no, sir, I didn't."

"Why did you do it?"

"I—I don't know, sir."

"Of course you know." Suddenly Jimmy's mind was carried back several years, to a headmaster he had both feared and respected. "For money? Excitement? Which was it?"

"Mon-money, sir."

"How much?"

"Five pounds!" Jimmy blurted out.

"What did you have to do for this five pounds?"

"They—they told me to be outside the shop and wait until their car drew up—it was a red Mini, sir—and then throw the brick."

"How often have you done this for them before?"

"*Never,* sir!"

"How well do you know the men?"

"I've never seen them before!" Jimmy gasped.

He sensed disbelief in Gideon's eyes, sensed a feeling of derision among the others. He knew this reaction to his words only too well. As a child he had once, and only once, told his father a lie. His father had beaten him for it, and he had never told another—but since then he had always been known as a liar. "More lies, Jimmy?" his father would say, reaching for his belt—while his mother pleaded with Jimmy, in the maudlin tones of an alcoholic, to tell his poor Ma the truth.

Now both his parents were dead and he lived with his sister Grace; but the old tradition persisted. He was a liar. He always had been, And so his sister cuffed and slapped him, in a misguided effort to make him tell the truth which he already told.

He was telling it now, yet this huge man, whose hands were so big and strong, would be like all the others: he would not believe him.

"If you'd never seen them before, why did you do as they asked?" demanded Gideon, and Jimmy stared, astonished that, for the first time, the truth had not been flung back in his face.

"You must have had a reason. You knew it was wrong, didn't you?"

"Yes—yes, sir. I—I needed the money. I lost ten pounds at the dog track last week—I *had* to have it, sir."

"I see. Did these men say why they approached you?"

"No. No, they didn't."

"How *did* they approach you? Exactly what did they say?"

"They came up to me last night, when I was going home. It was in the alley near where I live with my sister, and they frightened me stiff, sir. Then they

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told me they'd give me five pounds if I promised to do this, and—and another five tonight. Ten pounds in all," he added, desperately anxious not to lie. "It would have been ten pounds, not five—"

"All right, I can add five and five," said Gideon brusquely. "Now, what did they say to you? Try to remember their exact words."

They had told him what they wanted him to do, what time he should do it; and they had told him to run away the moment he had smashed the window. And he *had* run, but had slipped and fallen. When he had been caught, the shop manager was lying inside the doorway, bleeding, and policemen had appeared as if out of the air, and the nightmare had begun. Jimmy told the story stumblingly but vividly; by the time he was finished, no one in the store looked at him with derision; it was more like pity.

"What about your parents?" Gideon asked; and Jimmy told him about them, and also that he had a mattress in a corner of the kitchen of his sister's flatlet. Friends? He had no friends, not really.

"All right, Morris," Gideon said. "Wait here for a few minutes." He looked at one of the uniformed men. "Get him a cup of coffee and a sandwich. He looks half starved."

Jimmy Morris stared at the back of the man whom he had thought would be an ogre, but who was one of the gentlest men he had ever met.

Gideon led the way to the back of the store, followed by the two plainclothes detectives, who closed the door and so cut off the boy from sight. Gideon pondered for a few minutes, and they knew better than to question him. At last he began to talk, ruminatively, as if he were thinking aloud.

"He's too frightened to lie, so it's all true. He's only a dupe, a gull, a pigeon. But no one would have picked on *any* boy—they'd have to be sure they could rely on him. And if they didn't know Jimmy, they must have known someone else who knew him. Someone who told them where they could find him last night—and that he was pushed for money and ready to do almost anything for that ten pounds." Gideon frowned. "Begins to add up, doesn't it?"

"Add up to what?" asked the Chief Inspector blankly.

"Only someone who was on fairly intimate terms with the boy *could* have known all these things. He hasn't any friends, his mother and father are dead, but—he lives with his sister."

"Sister!" exclaimed the others, as if some great truth had been revealed to them. "Of course, his sister."

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Later that day Grace Morris stood glaring at her younger brother as they faced each other in Gideon's office.

"You told them what I'd said about these men. You *must* have told them. You beastly little liar! You promised me you wouldn't say anything!"

Ashen-faced, Jimmy Morris stood silent and afraid.

"All right, Grace," Gideon said. "You told your brother to do what these men wanted him to do and he did it. Now who are they, and where can we find *them*? There's no point in refusing to tell me—we'll catch them soon enough whether you tell me or not; and you'll only make things worse for yourself if you don't."

She told him, still glaring at her brother in vicious anger, still convinced she had been betrayed.

The men were arrested that night, the haul still in their possession.

They were charged with robbery with violence, which charge would be changed to murder if the manager of the store died.

They confirmed that they had never seen Jimmy before, but that they knew his sister well.

"Now, Jimmy, I want you to understand this," Gideon was saying the next morning, just before the court hearing. "Tell the magistrate the truth and he will believe you. You're young enough to be put on probation. Your sister will go to prison for her part in the crime, but you won't. The probation officer will find you a job, and a hostel where you can live, and if you don't get into any more trouble you'll be all right. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you believe me?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"That's fine," said Gideon. "So stop worrying."

He put a reassuring hand on Jimmy's shoulder; and something of Gideon's compassion, of his warm-heartedness and confidence, passed itself on to the boy.

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a *NEW* Van der Valk story by

NICOLAS FREELING

Here is the sixth in Nicolas Freeling's new series about Van der Valk, Chief Inspector of Amsterdam's Juvenile Brigade . . . the story of two pigeons, one soft and downy, the other venturesome and vivacious, and how Van der Valk, like his London counterpart, Gideon, proves himself anything but a cold-blooded, hard-hearted policeman; and like Gideon, Van der Valk knows the true meaning of his job . . .

VAN DER VALK AND THE TWO PIGEONS

by NICOLAS FREELING

CHIEF INSPECTOR VAN DER Valk had been in England on business, and he first saw them on the night-ferry train which trundles its slightly dirty way from the dismal hubbub of Liverpool Street to Lethe's muddy shore at Harwich. Neither is what you would call a place to make you fall in love with England's green and pleasant land, and he wondered why they were crying so desolately.

It was high summer. The train was crowded with purposeful Germans gathered round their cheerleaders, and smaller, grimmer groups of sturdy Britons; but all were staggering under fearful burdens—huge lumps of shapeless textiles, great clattering bundles of ironmongery. One could barely move. Smells of beer and sweaty jollity rose above the English-railway scent of dust.

Van der Valk was pinned down under a table in the swaying, gibbering car, watching the two girls fill in their immigration forms. They were Dutch, looking isolated in the hearty mill of holidaymakers, the more bizarrely since they went on gulping and weeping into grimy handkerchiefs.

One was the prototype of the country girl—a big pink shapeless

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thing all soft and downy, with that wispy hair that is neither blonde nor brown. The other was smaller, thinner, with a close cap of brown hair and gamine good looks; her vivacious features would be pretty when not smeared with crying.

He watched them limping with pathetic suitcases along the icy, drafty platform at Harwich, their backsides sticking out in dirty blue jeans. He saw them again in Hoek van Holland, under the horrid blue notice saying *Welcome Home* where starched, bedizened military police examine everyone for signs of subversion. They did not cry at being welcomed home, but looked utterly forlorn.

He saw them again, shuffling toward the exit of the Central Station in Amsterdam, the dumpy one stumbling along more uncoordinated than ever from sleeping in the train. But the slim girl had a remnant of tautness in her bearing, and she was shouldering a discolored canvas bag as though she would not easily loosen her grip on youth, on enjoyment, on life itself. The two pigeons, thought Van der Valk. But in the story, surely, only one pigeon went away. The nervous one had stayed at home. Yes, but in his mind there they were—the two pigeons . . .

It was a month later and he had forgotten them, but despite the change he knew the pigeon at once when she came forward to serve him in a dairy, over in the dingy quarter between central Amsterdam and the docks. Now she was fresh and rosy, almost pretty in a clean white apron, wholesome as the smells of cheese and yoghurt. She had a country accent, an earthy thickness in her speech; he had known she would.

"Where's your friend?" asked Van der Valk cheerfully.

She looked startled, but she had the round-eyed, perpetually bewildered look of her type.

"What friend?"

"I saw you last dragging your bags along in England, the two of you."

"Oh . . . I don't know. She went away, I think. I—I had just met her, that's all."

Why was he so sure she was lying? And why should she lie?

Sure enough it was in August, barely ten days later, that he saw the other one, the venturesome pigeon, in the street, not a hundred meters from the dairy in the Oude Schans. Shiny slim legs twinkled under her pale-lilac miniskirt; the smooth cap of hair was now bright blonde, and she swung a jaunty little handbag.

Van der Valk should have been delighted with this pleasant sight; instead he frowned. He made a half-hearted step as though to follow her, but it was eight in the evening and he was tired. He

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put a cigarette in his mouth and compressed his lips so that it jumped up and down and touched his nose. Then he shrugged and went home. The Oude Schans, a lifeless and dingy canal, was some distance from the tourists' red-light quarter, but not as far as that; and when a day later he was in the Warmoestraat, which is the district bureau for the old quarter, he asked the desk sergeant if anything was known about the two pigeons.

"Short blonde hair and a lilac mini? Doesn't ring any bell but I'll keep an eye out. I can think of several—but all nearer forty than twenty."

"This one," said Van der Valk dryly, "is the wrong side of twenty—my side."

It was odd—he was worried about his two pigeons. Naturally, hundreds of teen-age girls go through the hands of the Juvenile Bureau every year, but he knew nothing to justify a professional interest. It was somehow personal. Had he not seen them crying in the train leaving England, dirty and bedraggled from a night on the North Sea Ferry, but with that odd spark of verve? He had his files of missing girls searched, a thankless task in August. Nothing.

But when toward mid-September he got a call from the Criminal Bureau, and an address near the Oude Schans, a thundercloud of foreboding rolled over the streets of Amsterdam so clean and bright at the dawn of a lovely late-summer's day.

"Teen-age girl, Van der Valk—I think you'd better look at this one."

The only surprise was that the dead girl was not the gay one in the lilac miniskirt. It was the milkmaid, and she was no longer rosy; her face showed the vile bluish color of strangulation. Lightning had struck the stay-at-home pigeon.

He climbed a narrow dark staircase to a third floor and found a youngish Inspector, not very experienced, who had plainly called in the older man for fear of making a mistake. Van der Valk looked round the room, with its tumble of clothes and possessions, the primitive washing arrangements, the dingy curtain down the middle that could be drawn to give privacy of a sort. He knew these down-at-the-heels houses in the older quarters, warrens of one-room flats rented cheap with a few sticks of junk furniture to students, married couples with no money, girls who work and men who do not. Nobody knows anyone else; questions are considered in poor taste; people come and go. The Inspector was looking at handbags, papers, letters, and making notes.

Van der Valk pointed to the other bed.

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"Find her yet?"

"Holy cow, I just got here."

"Better find her quick—or you might find her in the river. Who reported it?" It was barely six, and few people were about as yet.

"A fellow who goes to work early. He saw the door open, thought it funny, and looked inside. Street door shut, of course."

"But is left open half the day."

"I guess so."

"I know these girls by sight. I think this will prove to be an open-and-shut case. We must find the other girl, and quickly. I'll get a description broadcast. She'll be easy to find—a waitress, some temporary job of that sort. She's certainly in trouble—and she may be in danger."

A noise in the open doorway made both men glance over their shoulders, for though it was a small noise, like a breath suddenly drawn in, it startled them. Van der Valk laid a hand on the other's arm, but the clown was already bawling, "Stop. Come here. Hey, you."

Van der Valk looked at him and uttered a short bitter monosyllable. "You frightened her off."

Both men made for the door. Van der Valk tripped on a ragged piece of carpet, bumped into the other, and lost several valuable seconds. He had to go gently on the dark worn stairway if he were not to break his neck. Nobody was at the street door; he cursed the policeman who should have been there, looked up and down, saw nobody, and said furiously, "Take that way, and hurry!" A street with canals on all four sides!

He forced himself to look carefully at doorways, alleys, and shadowed patches. Amsterdam hereabouts goes to bed late and nobody was about. He was very afraid. He stopped at the corner, listening above the silence and the distant grumble of the stirring city, and then he heard the sullen noise of a heavy object striking water, and ran, but he had taken the wrong turn. When he saw the movement on the scummy water he was breathless and in a sweat, but still able to curse: disgusting foul water, fool of a girl.

He took his jacket and shoes off, trying to slow his clumsy movements, and went in with a bellyflop. He blew a foul taste out of his nose and mouth, swam like a wounded hippo, tried to judge distance, dived, wondering if he would ever come up and muttering, "Please, not both."

Five minutes later he was sitting giddily on greasy pavingstones, throwing up. Two Amsterdammers whose windows had been open—they are never greatly surprised at persons or things falling in the canal—were

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holding another figure carefully, helping it to throw up too.

"Police car," gasped Van der Valk, lurching to rubber legs.

"When did you have your last typhoid shots?" a bored intern asked at the hospital.

"Is the girl all right?" He got up, hitched a brown ambulance blanket to stop it from falling off, and looked to see if everything was still in his jacket.

"She'll be all right. We'll keep her, naturally, a day or two. She's in shock—large dose of sedative."

"Keep her carefully." He looked over at the Inspector, who was standing there staring as though Van der Valk were the monster from ten thousand fathoms, all gray ooze (look like it, and sure smell like it, he decided).

"As soon as she can talk get a description of all the men she's been with—one of them killed her little friend."

"A psychopath?"

"How the hell should I know? Is there a cup of hot coffee around?"

"Two pigeons," he said slowly. It was the next day; he was sitting in his office; two sets of distraught parents, arrived from the backwoods, were gibbering at him. "They were always together, and one was the natural leader, always. It was her idea to go to England—am I right?"

"But we thought they were still there. We've had letters—"

"Slowly please. Two girls went to England, to the usual 'au pair' jobs. Where was it, by the way?"

"A place called Scarborough."

"We'll have to get in touch with the police there. One left her job. But she didn't want to go back to Holland, which is dull. She liked England. I saw them, crying, on the boat train. We don't know yet—perhaps she got into mischief. Perhaps her permit was canceled. It was something they did not care or dare to admit in their letters. Forced to leave, they came back as far as Amsterdam, and decided to stay there. It was exciting. They wrote to acquaintances in England, enclosing occasional letters to be given an English stamp and postmark. To keep you from inquiring.

"Now, I'm afraid, we have a sadder tale. They had to find jobs here. In the summer that is not difficult. The quiet girl found a job in a dairy—simple, pleasant work. A docile girl, easily led. The other wanted life—thrills. Work is not thrilling. We learned she took a job as a hotel chambermaid. Poorly paid, but the evenings were free. You must not blame her if she slipped into bad company. Many of these girls slide onto the fringe, surreptitious pickups in the bars and cafés. In the summer, with the town full of tourists, this becomes very

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difficult to control. One cannot upset and frighten visitors with unending identity checks.

"The other, we may guess, wanted no part of that life, but she had no resource but in her active friend. One day, perhaps, the other brought a man back to the room in the side street. She had to learn to pay no attention, draw the curtain, and go to sleep. One man—we have him, by the way—remembered the address and returned one night. The street door was still open—they often are, up to midnight. The people who live in these houses are honest, but casual, irresponsible, and feel they have little to lose and much convenience to gain.

"The man was quite drunk. He had no vicious purpose—he had no idea except to find a girl who had pleased him. He found the wrong girl. Probably she lost her head and began to scream and it is quite likely, as he claims, that he wished only to silence her. She was not assaulted. He was frightened and ran away, leaving the door open. Nobody saw him. I am sorry—it is not a pretty story.

"The other had stayed out all night. In the early morning she came back to change and go to work as usual. She found the dead body of her friend and overheard a scrap of conversation between two policemen. Incoherent with terror and remorse, her one idea was to seek death herself. She has suffered, and will suffer, much more than her friend."

"You yourself, Chief Inspector, saved her from death." The girl's father was a prosperous shopkeeper from a small provincial town, not at all a bad or even a stupid man.

Van der Valk looked at him. "But I did not save the other. I saw her in the shop, looking quite happy. I thought nothing of it. I caught a glimpse of her friend, with her hair dyed, in the street. And I thought little enough of that. She had not been noticed in bad company. After this month she would have been. But the police are overworked in summer. A regrettable fatality."

"You cannot be blamed. We blame ourselves."

"Try not to blame her."

Van der Valk accompanied the two worthy couples to the door and went to see Commissaire Boersma.

"Such things happen every day," Van der Valk said after the business had been covered. "Why should I be so upset?"

The Commissaire looked at him, shifting the pipe in his teeth.

"The lightning struck the wrong pigeon," he said, "and there's something about those night ferryboats that brings out the romantic in you. Next time I'll go myself to England."

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two *NEW* stories

that go together —

Once again we give you a pairing of stories—"An Incident at Devil's Rock" by Trevor Black, and "An Accident in Hudson Heights" by Lawrence Treat. These two stories have something in common—but we'll leave it to you to discover that "something" in your own reading . . .

AN INCIDENT AT DEVIL'S ROCK

by TREVOR BLACK

I HEARD THE GIRL'S SCREAM at the exact moment I realized I was lost. My Chrysler Imperial bounced over the deep-rutted secondary road as I squinted through the windshield.

It was dark, almost dark enough to conceal the two figures struggling ahead of me in the middle of the road. I slammed on my brakes and slid to a halt.

My headlights appeared to have no effect on the young man who sat on top of a younger girl. The girl was being beaten, her head swaying from side to side with the force of the blows.

"Stop him! Stop him!" she screamed.

I climbed out of the car and immediately stepped into a puddle of water. With more caution I moved forward and reached the couple.

Up close I saw that the young attacker had tremendous biceps; they swelled with each brutal slap of his hand. I licked my lips and tried to sound as angry as I felt.

"That will be enough!"

His hand stopped in mid-air and he turned. For a moment he stared at me, almost in fascination. My knees were trembling and I had the horrible thought that this young thug could very easily kill me.

Without warning he jumped up, hands moving nervously. I said nothing and began to retreat slowly. He was much too big, much larger than myself; I didn't

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have a chance against him.

For a few cold seconds he studied me and then I said, foolishly, "Why don't you leave?"

He did just that; I was the most surprised man in Northern California. He walked slowly across the road, each step making a squishing noise in the mud. Then abruptly he halted and glanced back.

Had he changed his mind?

I waited and my hands ached for something to do. Then, without a word, he ran to his left, reached the brush and disappeared, branches swaying behind him.

The girl moaned and rolled over and I went to her. Bending down, I saw she was no more than eighteen, with long blonde hair and a delicate oval face. There was mud on her left cheek. I used my pocket handkerchief to wipe it off.

"Are you all right?" I asked.

It was enough to make her look at me. The eyes, a warm green, shone and then suddenly flooded. I tried to say something and she fell against me, sobbing, her body jerking with each sob. We rose and she reached out blindly with her free hand. I guided her to the warmth and protection of my car and opened the passenger door. She got in.

Quickly I scanned the darkness. Would he come back? I thought not, but I got in the car and locked all the doors. The windows were already closed. Remembering my lights, I dimmed them and turned my attention to the girl.

She was doing well but I suspected a false bravery. Her eyes opened and closed several times as though she were trying to forget what had happened.

"Open your window. Please." Her voice was low, yet calm.

I nodded and did as she asked. Concerned, I put my hand on her shoulder. "Can I do—" I began.

"Please," she cried, cutting me off. "I'll be fine. Just—just give me a moment."

She had no purse that I could see. It was probably lying in the road but I wasn't about to get out and look for it. I reached under my seat and found a box of tissues. She accepted the box without a word, plucked out one tissue and dabbed it against her face.

It was difficult not to be drawn to this girl. As she moved the tissue over her face I experienced a definite feeling of attraction. It had been three weeks since I had last seen my wife Louise.

The girl finished cleaning up and leaned back in the seat. She strained her neck backward, rotating her head, her eyes closed.

My own eyes moved downward, taking in the sweater and short pleated skirt. One of her knees

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showed through a torn stocking.

I quickly looked away, focusing my attention on the blackness outside.

"Thank you for helping me," she said, her voice careful in its phrasing.

I swallowed and turned. The girl swept her hands through her plentiful silky hair and I remembered Louise's clipped and tired-looking locks.

"Who was he?" I asked.

The question seemed to upset her. "Someone I know. But not well enough, I guess." Her right hand crept down the side of her head, stopping on a reddened cheek.

I looked at her and realized I was staring and then she was staring at me. It was very quiet and very cold and, unexpectedly, she sobbed, remembering, and then collapsed against me.

She needed me. I put an arm around her. The fine head wanted to bury itself in my chest and I cradled it. Instantly we were straining against each other, her head lifted, and I bent my head to kiss her cheek and found lips instead.

We needed each other. It was as simple and impulsive as that.

The first of the blinding flashes exploded near me. I started, yelling, "What—?"

Two, no, three more flashes burst outside the open window. I yelled again and moved sideways, groping blindly. I felt a jarring blow against my neck. I clawed some more as the door opened and I tumbled out into the night and blackness . . .

". . . you understand me?"

Someone was talking. I shook my head and my eyes seemed to focus for the first time in quite a while; I seemed to be lifted out of a gray haze and then dropped into this office.

It was large, neat, had three comfortable chairs like the one I was sitting in and there was a desk. It was a wooden desk, painted black, very solid-looking.

Behind the desk, standing, scowling down at me was the most prominent feature of the room. Big would not describe this man. He was enormous, with a square, block face and fierce black eyes. The hair was black too and there was a great deal of it on the exposed parts of the body; wire-like tufts curled along his tanned, thick arms. He had on a white shirt and I was sure you would never find its size in a department store.

The voice was a surprise. Soft, amazingly soft, as though he were narrating a travelogue of favorite Mexican siesta places.

Right now he was frowning. "Did you hear me, Mr. King?"

"Sorry," I answered, squirming in the chair, "I'm still a trifle wobbly."

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He said nothing and finally I broke the silence. "Is the girl—"

"She's here. In another room."

"That's good. I was afraid—"

"What's the matter?"

Frantically I hunted through my pockets. My wallet was gone. "My wallet! It's—"

"Right here," he finished for me. It was lying on the desk and he tapped it.

"May I have it?" I asked.

He handed the wallet to me, saying nothing. I looked inside. The money was gone. All except seven dollars.

"Those are nice shoes," the man above me said unexpectedly.

"What? Oh, my alligator loafers? Yes, they are. I paid $80 for them."

"That's a lot of money. For shoes."

"Yes. Uh—speaking of money, I had over $900 in this wallet. It's gone."

He considered my statement, his black eyes cutting.

Finally he said. "Mr. King. Let's start over, okay?"

"Yes," I agreed. "But I don't believe I remember your name. And call me Lawrence—Larry."

His glance said I should have remembered his name. But the voice was soft as before. "John Barlow. I'm Chief of Police here in Devil's Rock. Suppose you tell me why you're in Devil's Rock."

I shifted in my chair and the policeman sat down behind the desk. "Fine," I nodded. "I was on my way to Keith City, actually. I just got lost."

"What's your business, Mr.—I mean, Larry."

"I own the King-Crown Printing Company. I have four branches in Northern California and check with the managers a few times each year. I find I have to or the managers get lax."

"Uh huh. You mentioned $900. Why so much cash on you?"

"Yes—well, you see, I normally carry large sums. Credit cards are fine, but anyone who does as much traveling as I do sometimes runs into people who prefer cash. I stay at the best places, naturally. Always."

"I bet you do."

I thought I heard something in his voice. Almost a mocking tone, almost a note of scorn. I ignored the thought, pushing on. "Listen, Mr. Barlow, I—"

"No!" he snapped at me. "*I* have a few questions!"

I felt stunned. The animal quality in his voice was like a slap. I thought grimly that if John Barlow ever lived in a jungle he'd definitely be the king of the beasts.

"Now," he said, "exactly how did you get here?"

I didn't understand. "What?"

"How did you get here to Devil's Rock?" His irritation was clear this time.

I still didn't understand. "Why,

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in my Chrysler, of course!"

He said nothing, studying my face. I dropped my head, very uncomfortable. I glanced up and he was writing on a small white pad.

"You say you arrived here in your Chrysler. What color?"

"What color? My god, man, what are you talking about?"

He leaped from his chair and almost ran around the desk, stopping a foot away. He leaned over me, his face inches from mine.

"What color?" he repeated.

It was difficult to think. His eyes stabbed me, d e m a n d i n g something I couldn't give him because I didn't understand. I told myself not to get excited. My stomach betrayed me, growling loudly.

"White," I said weakly. I could hardly hear my own voice.

Barlow wheeled and stalked back to his seat behind the desk. He wrote once again on the pad.

"White," he said to no one but himself and his tone was openly contemptuous.

"Mr. Barlow, what is all this? Tell me." I tried to keep a pleading note out of my voice, but I failed.

The Chief of Police leaned back in his chair. "What this is," he stated slowly, "is there's a girl in the next room and she says you came out of nowhere tonight and tried to assault her."

This time I was really stunned. I tried to close my mouth and it wouldn't cooperate.

Barlow interpreted my silence as a confession. "Why did you do it, huh? Larry, you can tell me."

That brought me out of it. "*I did not!* I most certainly did no such thing!"

His grin was my answer to whom he believed. I wanted to tell this man how it had been, how I had tried to help, but again I was tongue-tied. Perhaps it was the way he looked at me or maybe it was the curious smile that lifted the corners of his mouth as though he had just heard an off-color joke.

It was then that a man I had never seen before walked into the room. He handed a package to the Chief, glanced at me, and left.

Barlow opened the package which was really a large manila envelope. He undid the metal fastener, deliberately slow, and I squirmed in my chair.

Photographs. I couldn't see them clearly from my chair. It took an effort not to spring forward and snatch them away from the man behind the black desk, studying, staring and eventually smiling at the prints he held in his hand.

Finally he shook his head at me, handing the photos across the desk.

"What were you saying, Larry?" The man was grinning again

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as I accepted the pictures.

Four prints, all quite good considering the darkness and the situation.

The girl's face was clear in all the photos. And mine was equally clear in two of them. It was a face filled with a physical desire that shocked me and made me ashamed.

As I sat there, the door to my left opened and I felt the presence of another person in the room.

I glanced up.

And saw the young man. The girl beater.

Desperately I tried to say something. But I couldn't speak. Frustration welled up inside and I felt the sting of my own tears.

The Chief of Police nodded at the youth.

"How's the wife?" he asked.

Wife?

"Oh, Sheila?" the boy answered, grinning. "Great. Just great. She's working on a chocolate malt right now."

Wife? I said it to myself again, blinking, trying to clear my eyes. Then I remembered something. She had wanted me to open the window!

Barlow was on his feet moving in front of me.

"Larry?" he said in the soft voice.

I remained slumped in my chair. It was too difficult to look up.

"Larry!" There was snap in his voice again.

My head came up. Somehow. I heard the words. Each and every one of them.

"Larry," he said calmly, "I want you and your alligator shoes out of this office. Now. You walk yourself to the Greyhound bus stop. Straight down the road. Your driver's license says you live in San Francisco. Is that right? *Larry!"*

I nodded.

"Okay. From here it's a six-dollar-and-fifteen-cent bus ride to San Francisco. I checked. That'll leave you phone money, Larry. You call home when you get there. Your wife can come and pick you up. Got it?"

I nodded again.

"And you listen to me, Larry. These prints are just that, prints. I've got the negatives and if we have any trouble—well, we'll see that your wife gets a few pictures. As far as any car goes—I mean if you *had* one, of course—you can tell your insurance company it was stolen. Not here in Devil's Rock—somewhere else. I'd like to help you, Larry, but you know how it is."

I looked up. Barlow was smiling, confident. Behind him the young man stood grinning, a duplicate.

The word jarred me. I looked at the boy more closely. The black hair, the square strong face, the

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tufts of hair on the arms.

The grin. The horrible, knowing grin.

"Yes," Barlow smiled, "we do want to keep this in the family, right, Larry?"

I leaped from my chair, grabbing the note pad off Barlow's desk. The small piece of paper he had been writing on.

I slumped back in my chair, staring at the top sheet. There were doodles, some curlicues and random letters and numbers. Only one word. Just one.

Sucker.

I jerked my head up, focusing on Barlow and the young man. They stood there grinning, mocking. The two faces, of father and son, told me there was not a damn thing I could do.

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LAWRENCE TREAT's

***new* crime story . . .**

And now, Lawrence Treat's "An Accident in Hudson Heights," which you will find almost completely different from Trevor Black's "An Incident at Devil's Rock"—different in plot, style, characters, texture, and denouement. But we said "almost completely different." There is one element the two stories have in common—but, paradoxically (such is the essence, indeed the quintessence, of the detective-crime-mystery story), even these two similar elements are different! Cryptic? Naturally . . .

AN ACCIDENT IN HUDSON HEIGHTS

by LAWRENCE TREAT

As she crossed the main boulevard in Hudson Heights, the red convertible seemed to shoot out from nowhere and slash across her front fender. It hit, then the cars separated. Brakes squealed, hers and the red car's. Somebody yelled, somebody else honked. The red car, with a woman in matching red at the wheel, drove over to the side of the busy thoroughfare and parked. Doris followed.

She wasn't hurt, the woman in red wasn't hurt, and both cars had suffered about the same amount of minor damage, but oh—the stupidity of it! And Doris, trying to sort out her feelings, was sure of nothing except her own exasperation.

She told herself to stay calm. She'd crossed the boulevard and turned left on a green light—perfectly proper. Traffic had stopped; she had been sure of that, but now she was no longer sure. Had she looked carefully enough? Walter always said, "Be sure to look in both directions." He was an expert driver, but she was comfortable driving only when she was drifting along a country road at twenty miles an hour. Then she could see the woods and note the flowers along the roadside.

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She was only half listening to the girl in the red sweater. The sweater matched the car, the lipstick matched both. She was black-haired, attractive, flashy. Her heavy breasts jutted out and you were drawn to them, or else to her eyes which were dark and angry.

She was talking to Doris and they were exchanging licenses. Her name was Maria Robi. She was speaking sarcastically, with an artificial sweetness, and she was demanding that Doris look at the damage she'd done and asking her what she'd been doing in that lane and whether she hadn't noticed the light and—

Doris finally flared up. "Me, the light? It was your fault. You shot out—I didn't even see you."

"Oh." The Robi girl picked up that last sentence. "You didn't see me! I thought so."

Angrily Doris scribbled. Name, address. Number of license plate. Name of insurance company. Her hands trembled, her throat was dry, and she found it hard to talk. Horns blared, and Doris realized that their two cars were blocking a lane. Drivers in the opposite direction slowed down to stare at them. Then, seeing that nobody was hurt, that nobody was killed, that there were no police, they speeded up and disappeared.

Doris climbed back into her car. She was shaken and nervous, and annoyed at herself, not for having done anything wrong, but for having been involved in an accident. *Could* she have avoided it?

She drove home slowly. I'm Doris Martin, suburbanite, wife of Walter Martin and mother of two pre-school children. I'm a careful driver and it was *not* my fault. That Robi woman had jumped a light and I can prove it. I saw her, I'll swear it. And she—

Red car, red sweater. Maria Robi. She was something more than a g g r e s s i v e, she was belligerently assertive and she seemed actually convinced that she was right and everybody else in the world was wrong.

Doris thought back to the details surrounding the accident. Shortly before, she'd been in the left lane waiting for the light to change. She'd been ready to take a left turn onto the boulevard as soon as the light turned green. A truck had stopped alongside her and the truck driver had leaned out.

He was grinning, and suddenly a surge of warmth shot through her, and she smiled back. The air was crisp, the sky blue, and the sunlight shone while a truck driver leered at her in frank, exuberant admiration.

"Hi, sister," he had called out. "Going my way?"

"I'm going up, up, and away," she said flirting.

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He laughed boisterously. "Take me along, sister."

Then the light had turned green. She noted that the boulevard traffic had stopped. After a second or two the truck had swung to the right and she had gone to the left, and it had happened.

Walter came home at 6:30 that evening, and she told him about the accident.

"Were you hurt?" he asked anxiously.

She smiled comfortably and moved into his arms. "No, nothing like that. Just a dent in the car."

"Good. I'll call Mike tomorrow and tell him about it." Mike was their friend and their insurance agent. "He'll handle it."

"No," she said quickly. "I'll call him. After all, it was my accident."

"You sound proud of it," Walter grinned.

"Not at all, but I want to tell him it was her fault. Entirely hers. The insurance company oughtn't to pay her."

"A lot they'll care."

"But it was her fault. And besides, I don't want an accident on my record. Our insurance rate will go up."

Walter shrugged. "We'll see what we can do," he said.

"But I don't want the insurance company to pay her. That's what makes the rates go so high. They say it's too much trouble to investigate, it's cheaper to pay a false claim than to fight it. No one ever bothers to think about what's right and what's wrong. Walter, I can't let her collect, and it's not only a matter of our premium being raised. It's a matter of honesty. Paying her for jumping a red light and running into me would be on my conscience."

"Sure," he said amiably. "I think you're right."

She was aware that she was getting wrought up, and that Walter was chiefly concerned with soothing her. Half of his business talent was his knack of never getting excited, never antagonizing others. And somehow, in the end, problems were usually solved exactly the way he wanted them to be. But this time Doris had made up her mind. She was going to see to it that the Robi woman wouldn't profit.

In the morning Doris phoned Mike, who tried to pass off her account of the accident as a joke. "All my customers run into cars whose fault it was."

"But she was going against a red light," Doris said. "Do you mean you want her to get away with it?"

"I just want you to be happy," he said amiably.

"Then don't pay her anything —not a cent."

"I'll see what I can do," he said. "But it's not up to me. All I can do is send along your report

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and hope the company will consider it. Now what you do is get an estimate of your damages, fill out the forms I send you, and then forget all about it. Okay?"

"I'll try," she said.

Later on in the morning she drove to the garage that serviced the family car. They sent her to a body works, where a mechanic examined the car and asked her in what amount her insurance was deductible. She said she had no collision insurance, that the cost would have to come out of her own pocket.

The mechanic seemed surprised. "Oh," he said. "That's different." He scribbled a new set of figures on his pad before he spoke to her again.

"Fifty dollars," he said. "But if you want the exact amount in writing it'll cost you five dollars."

"No, your approximation will do. And thanks."

She came home and in order to pin down the precise circumstances she drew a diagram and wrote out an account of what had happened. She felt better after she had finished. Somehow the accident was no longer a bother to her, and she was thinking of the children when the doorbell rang.

The woman standing on the porch was young, and Doris told herself that the girl had a sweet face and she was probably doing door-to-door selling in order to help out her husband, who was in graduate work at the university. Doris smiled pleasantly, knowing that, whatever it was, she'd probably buy.

"Are you Mrs. Walter Martin?" the girl said. Doris nodded and the girl handed her a paper and said, "Then I have something for you."

Doris opened the folded sheet. SUMMONS. *You are hereby summoned to—*

She called out, "Please, I thought you were—" The girl was now walking down the path, and Doris glanced at the summons again. It was an action for damages to the Robi car, in the amount of $475.50.

Four hundred and seventy-five dollars and fifty cents when similar repairs were going to cost Doris only fifty dollars!

She had an impulse to call out to the girl again and protest, but it would have been silly. This was hardly the girl's fault, whereas that Robi woman—oh! The blatancy of it was infuriating, and Doris sat down at the phone and called Mike. He said not to worry, just send the summons to him.

"But I told you—I don't want the company to pay her," Doris said. "It was her fault, entirely."

"She claims otherwise, doesn't she?"

"Yes. That's obvious."

"Then you'll have to hire a lawyer and go to court—or else

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let us handle the thing."

Doris sighed. "I see," she said slowly, and hung up.

But this was wrong. Instead of collecting money, the Robi woman ought to be prosecuted for what she'd done.

The idea kept recurring to Doris. She didn't like to make trouble, she'd had no intention of prosecuting, but after that summons everything was different. And resolutely Doris left the house and drove to the police office in the Town Hall. Sergeant Burns, on duty, greeted her.

"Hello, Mrs. Martin," he said. "Anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. Somebody jumped a red light and ran into my car yesterday, and I'd like to bring charges. Can I do that?"

"Certainly." Burns picked up his pencil. "Just give me the details. Anyone injured?"

"No. There was property damage to both cars, and the woman who caused it is someone named Maria Robi. Her license-plate number is JR-15. Here's her address and the number of her operator's license. It happened at the crossing near the shopping center."

"What evidence do you have?" the sergeant asked.

"I was there. She turned on red and ran into me."

Burns put his pencil down. "Does she admit it?"

"No, and that's one of the reasons I'm so mad. She denies the whole thing, and she's lying."

"It may be hard to prove. Mrs. Martin, if you take my advice, you'll just forget about it."

"Why? Why should I? I'm right, I know what happened."

"We'd be glad to file a complaint if we had evidence to back it up, but we can't go into court without at least one outside witness."

"You mean you refuse? That I can't do anything unless you decide to let me?"

"Not at all. I'm advising you not to go ahead with this, simply because cases like this are so hard to prove. But you have a perfect right as a citizen to go before a judge and sign an information. I'm merely telling you that, on the basis of our experience, you're not likely to get a conviction. Not against Mrs. Robi."

Doris caught something in the sergeant's tone. "Oh," she said. "You know her?"

"No, never even saw her, but I suggest that you talk this over with your husband. Then, if you decide to go through with it, maybe the two of you can come in here and we'll see what we can do."

"I don't understand."

"Mrs. Martin," the sergeant said, "I think you should go slow." Then the phone rang, and before picking it up he said, "Nice seeing you. Stop in any time you

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need a little help." He turned away and spoke into the mouthpiece.

After a few seconds Doris left, but she kept wondering who Mrs. Robi was. The way the sergeant had reacted to the name bothered Doris. He knew something. Maybe the Robi woman had been in trouble before, or maybe her husband had political influence. There definitely was something. And all the more reason, Doris thought, why Mrs. Robi shouldn't get away with anything.

Doris made no mention to Walter of her visit to the police. Walter would have talked her out of prosecuting, and he would have had compelling reasons for doing nothing about it. But she was determined on action of some kind.

The accident, Mrs. Robi, that summons, and the behavior of the insurance company and of Sergeant Burns—all these were rarely out of Doris's mind the next day, and they were still on her mind after lunch when she went out to the garden with a pair of shears and started cutting flowers for the table. She was absorbed in her task and hardly heard the car drive up. When she happened to turn around, it was already there, and two men had just stepped out of it and were approaching her.

They wore no ties. Their sports shirts were neat, their clothes conservative. They were both long-nosed and sallow, with brown eyes and heavy lashes. One of them was heavy-set, the other was spare. Thinking back afterward, Doris was never sure which of them said what. In a way they seemed to be selfless. They said *we,* never *I.*

"Mrs. Martin?" one of them said politely. "We're friends of Mrs. Robi."

"What of it?" Doris said sharply.

"We like her. In a way, we sort of take care of her."

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I don't think I want to hear any more." Doris wheeled and tried to walk away, but somehow they were standing there in front of her, blocking her off. They didn't touch her, neither then nor at any other time.

"Call us ambassadors of good will," they said softly. "We like to stop trouble before it starts, and we don't want to see Mrs. Robi get in trouble. She's too nice a person."

"What do you mean?" Doris asked shrilly. "Say what you came to say, and then leave."

"She's got a right to collect. You don't want to stand in her way. Mrs. Martin, her friends don't think it's right."

"Is that it? Just the money?"

"You got us all wrong," they said. "We came here to protect

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you and your kids. You like them, and we like them, too. We'd hate for anything to happen to them, and Mrs. Robi's friends—well, they're sort of impetuous. Unless we head them off—well, those kids of yours, they're just sitting ducks."

Doris felt her heart stop, and then pound furiously. "Please," she said, and was unable to say anything more.

"You understand, don't you? We're out of it, we just want to help everybody and keep it cool. We like kids. And Mrs. Robi, she don't even know we're here."

"We wouldn't tell her," the other one said.

"Not for anything. We came because we're friends of hers. We thought you ought to lay off."

"You understand, don't you?"

They wheeled, walked off, climbed into the car. Doris watched it back up, turn, then head out to the street. It rolled off sedately and disappeared around the first corner. Doris took her shears and with all her might slammed them down into the earth. The handle hit first. The shears bounced, then lay flat.

She ran back into the house. She was out of breath, and she lay down on the couch and stared. She didn't cry.

After a while she got up. Mafia. That explained everything. That was why Sergeant Burns had reacted to the name. And suddenly the Mafia was no longer something remote, something she read about in the paper; now it was a force and a threat about to smash through the fragile glass windows of her own home.

She was sick with resentment and fear, but she refused to believe that a person like herself, an ordinary, respectable, law-abiding person, had to grovel before a gangster. She couldn't and she wouldn't! She had the entire strength of the community behind her, she had the whole government on her side. All she had to do was ask for protection.

She thought of Sergeant Burns. But he'd have a dozen excuses. He'd say that the threat was too vague, that she couldn't prove it, that nothing had really happened, that it was impossible to give her a twenty-four-hour guard. He'd be full of homilies and tired advice.

She recalled all that had happened. The insurance company that didn't want to be bothered with concepts like justice—cheaper to pay. Then Mike, being practical: leave it to him, don't worry your little head. But the insurance companies and the practical people—they were the ones who'd botched matters. They'd hiked up insurance costs so that everybody all along the line paid his share. The repairman who deliberately jacked up his price, the insurance adjuster who okayed

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it because he got his, the client who consented because it cost him nothing, when otherwise he might have to pay for his own repairs. Fifty dollars deductible? Okay, so the repairmen overcharged by fifty dollars, and the policy holders were delighted. Well, Doris refused to be any part of it.

She didn't think out the idea that now occurred to her, she didn't stop to weigh it. If she had, she would have stayed there on the couch and worked herself up to a fine state of terror. Instead, with the idea seething, she jumped up, ran out to her car, and drove straight to the Robi house. She had the address, she knew the section and she had no trouble finding the place.

The house was not prepossessing, and to Doris's surprise it was pleasantly modern and entirely in good taste. She had expected ostentation, with flashy flowers and flamboyant statuary on a model lawn. Instead, here was a house that Doris herself would have loved to live in.

She marched up the path, and for an instant her courage seemed about to slip away. Ringing the bell, she was unsure of what to say. But when the door opened and Maria Robi stood there facing her, smiling, sarcastic, so sure of herself, Doris's anger boiled up and her emotions took over.

"Yes?" Mrs. Robi said icily.

"I came here to tell you not to do it," Doris blurted out. "To make them apologize. Right now. Apologize—or you'll regret it."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't lie," Doris said. "You know exactly what I'm talking about. They threatened my children. Tell them they'd better not do anything. Because if anything happened to them—anything—anything at all—do you hear? If anything happened to them, you'd be responsible and I'd do plenty about it."

She saw the pair of men now, stepping out of a side room and starting toward a rear door.

"Stay there and listen," Doris called out to them, "but don't dare come near me. You threatened me and that was a mistake, because I'd make such a fuss that you'd never hear the end of it. When respectable people make a fuss, the whole community backs them up. They'd tear you to pieces. Did you ever see a mob in action? Did you? And do you want them to come after you?"

They halted as if they'd been ordered to. As for Mrs. Robi, she seemed to grow pale, and her voice sounded forced and unnatural. For the first time she was not completely sure of herself.

"You're getting hysterical," she said. She stopped to take a breath. "Is there anything else you want to say?"

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was the blued object that the man held steadily in his black-gloved right hand. The pistol, to Mr. Pepys, was only slightly smaller than a howitzer and eager to serve the purpose for which it had been designed.

"Never mind how I got in, you little fink," the bandit rumbled. "I could write a book on ways of getting in and out. The point is, you got a customer for your place of business—me. I want a loan—a big fat one."

Mr. Pepys tugged the bed linens to his quaking chin. "Take them as a gift," he pleaded, struggling for breath. "Wallet on the dressing table—solid gold watch beside it—all the sterling from downstairs you can carry—"

"You think I'm some kind of a nut?" the robber snorted. "I want bread, man—not a few crumbs. Roll out, pal, we're going to open that nice burglarproof vault in your office."

"You're making a mistake," Mr. Pepys wailed. "The vault is only for my records—"

"The vault would do credit to the Third National Bank," the robber said. "You're a slippery eel who has skinned the law a thousand times. The loan-shark operation you run is just a front. You finance the really big jobs—warehouse burglaries, truck hijackings. Then you fence the stuff on the Coast in carload lots. I got a hunch the vault is busting with undeclared income. You're a rich little spider in the safety of your web, but I'm your preying mantis, pally. I chew up spiders for breakfast!"

The menacing shadow flowed across the bed. The muzzle of the gun toyed with the tip of Mr. Pepys' shuddering nose.

"Come on, you little creep," the bandit said in a voice obviously losing patience. "Put your pants on and we'll ease out to one of your fancy cars and you'll chauffeur me to your office building."

The gun inched up to a point between the narrow, straining eyes.

"Or would you rather I do it the hard way?" the robber inquired almost pleasantly. . .

Osteen jazzed the engine of cruiser 17 as Buckwald loomed around the dark rear corner of the downtown office building. Buckwald opened the off-side back door of the car, tossing in a black satchel that landed with a satisfyingly heavy thump. Buckwald tumbled in, slammed the door, and Osteen shot the car away in the darkness of the back street.

While Osteen's expertise with the car put distance between them and Everyman's Loan Company, Buckwald stripped off the gloves, the stocking mask, and the coveralls that hid his patrolman's uniform. He rolled everything in a

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tight package and slipped it into the satchel, on top of several pounds of big-denomination currency. Then he grunted over into the front seat, settled himself beside his partner, brushing the wrinkles from his uniform and placing his visored patrolman's cap neatly on his iron-gray head.

"No trouble," Osteen commented, the words thick with the easing of inner tension.

"Like we was computers," Buckwald grinned. He and Osteen were cut from the same mold, husky, broad-shouldered, square of face and steady in the eyes. Harness bulls of a generation ago, lately known as Pigs among the nether fringes.

"How much did we get?" Osteen asked.

"Over a hundred grand."

They traded side-eyed looks, and grinned. The money would be stashed later tonight, a brown-wrapped package in the commonplace security of a bus-station rental locker. It would be the first egg in the nest.

The two-way radio crackled to life in the dashboard. "Cars thirty, twenty-two, and seventeen. Cordon area of Gramercy Building. Night watchman reports discovery of Damon Pepys bound and gagged in his office, Everyman's Loan Company. Vault open. Robbery detail on way. Seal the neighborhood. Check every car and pedestrian."

Buckwald plucked the microphone from its holder, depressed a button. "Seventeen. We read. On our way."

Cruiser 17 was the first to acknowledge, and headlights stabbed an arc as the car swung in a U-turn and headed back toward the Gramercy Building. The rising murmur of its siren somehow suggested a peal of droll laughter.

Buckwald was sitting on a wooden bench between rows of scarred metal lockers when Osteen ambled in the next night. Buckwald lowered the newspaper he was reading, nodding a hello to his partner. He stretched, yawned, stood.

The two opened adjoining lockers and began to peel out of their civilian suits, shirts, ties. Like most old-line cops they usually reported in early. They had almost an hour in which to don uniforms, have a mug of coffee, and present themselves in the ranks in the squadroom for pre-duty inspection and briefing by the captain.

"Morning papers gave the Nylon Hooded Bandit quite a play," Osteen remarked, slipping his suit coat on a wire hanger.

"Yeah," Buckwald said. "But the late sheets have got a new angle. Seems this Pepys fellow is having a lot of trouble explaining how he happened to have all that cash in his vault."

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"How about that?" Osteen grunted. He patted a yawn. "Man, what a nap! Never had such a good day's sleep since I can remember."

"I guess it's being on duty again," Buckwald remarked. "I didn't sleep worth a damn, night or day, while the suspension lasted."

"Me neither." Osteen nodded as if to say he knew exactly what Buckwald meant. "It kept grabbing me in the gut."

A mere hour and twenty minutes after Osteen and Buckwald had clocked in and wheeled car 17 up the ramp from the police garage, Raoul Chastain moved along the plush carpet of a softly lighted, mahogany-paneled corridor. He paused at the hand-rubbed mahogany door to his inner sanctum, flipping a golden keychain from his pocket.

Into the corridor drifted the faint sounds of laughter as a nationally known comedian regaled the Cadillac-and-mink patrons of the Chez Raoul with double-entendre humor.

While he fitted a key in his office door lock, Raoul's lips curled in a mildly disdainful smile—for his patrons, the comedian, the swanky supper club itself. To him it was just another joint that barely paid its way. But it served its purpose.

He turned the key, a thin tallish man in an imported Italian suit, pink shirt, and coordinated necktie. He had a long slender neck and a face that was almost pretty, with a rosebud mouth, large dark eyes, and glistening black hair that swept back to cover the upper portions of his ears.

He swung the door open and gave himself a second to admire his current layout, huge, bleached-wood desk, woolly wall-to-wall carpeting of snowiest white, draperies of purest silk, oversize chairs and couches upholstered in white calfskin. It was certainly a far cry from the old days when he'd started at the bottom rung of the Syndicate ladder. They'd called him Dirk then because of his propensity for and utter efficiency with that type of knife.

He heeled the door shut. The action unshielded the husky figure pressed to the inner wall beside the doorway. Even so, Raoul took two steps into his office without seeing the other man.

Raoul stiffened on tiptoe when a not unpleasant guttural broke the silence: "Walk on eggs, Dirk, m'boy. The thin-shelled rotten kind."

Chastain was too old a hand to make any sudden move. His long thin neck creased as his head turned slowly. He took in the green coveralled figure, the flattened and twisted features pressed tightly beneath the nylon stocking

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mask. And the gun. His dark eyes dwelt there. Its angle and ease suggested to Chastain that it was being held by a pro.

Chastain glanced carefully at the floor-length silken draperies.

"That's right." The robber took a step from the wall. "Over the roof. Down a nylon line. Gimmick the electronic tape to keep from setting off the burglar alarm. Jimmy the window. I dropped in, literally. Duck soup. I'll drop out the same way. The line reaches the ground. Let's make it all sweet and easy, huh, pal?"

Chastain's narrow wiry shoulders relaxed faintly. "All right. There's a few grand in the desk. I'll give you the key so you don't have to scar the wood."

"Who's talking about a few grand?" the bandit said. "You've put protection money in the right places, so you've not been nailed. But I know Chez Raoul is a cover for one of the biggest bookie operations in the country. You're the heart, the nerve center, chum, the pot wherein the whirlpool flows. So let's go to the counting room, where the heavy sugar is."

Genuine alarm scorched Chastain's eyes. "You're nuts! You don't know what you're doing. You're dealing with—"

"The Syndicate," the robber said. "The fat millionaire and gutter-slugging boys. So tell them what I look like behind this mask."

Chastain backed a few steps, beginning to sweat, his eyes hard on the man stalking him. The gun jabbed suddenly, biting Chastain's midriff and knocking a cough from him. He bent, grabbing his stomach.

"I don't like to repeat myself, pal," the robber said. "Let's away to the hidden counting room without any more palaver."

"Listen." Chastain's strangled voice was edged with desperation. "I'll make a deal."

"The counting room," the bandit said.

Chastain looked about frantically. He moaned, his eyes coming back to the contorted features sheathed in nylon.

"The Syndicate will never forgive you—or me—for this. Couldn't we—"

"We couldn't," the robber said. "The long arm of the Syndicate is in your future—but I'm the here and now, Dirk, old boy."

Tonight had been Osteen's turn. Buckwald had cruiser 17 moving almost before Osteen leaped inside. Osteen went through the ritual of stripping his burglar's garb, packing it neatly into another suitcase of money, and scrounging his way to the front seat.

They nosed onto the city expressway a mile from the Chez Raoul, two rugged, pleasantly bearish-looking old cops just cruising along on their tour of

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duty. Buckwald reminded a passing sports car of the speed limit with a friendly beep of the siren.

"Chastain?"

"Left him locked in a closet," Osteen said.

"He'll have to report the robbery."

Osteen nodded. "It's his one chance of making his case with the Syndicate, of trading a cement overcoat at the bottom of the river for something a little less worse."

"It'll mean more publicity. We'll splash the front pages this time." Buckwald sighed. "How much did we get?"

Osteen, a big grin splitting his face, let his partner hang for a second. "Over two hundred thou."

Buckwald whistled softly. Osteen laughed, picked up the tone, and soon the pair were merrily whistling *Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight.*

Neither had felt so good just a month ago. That day had marked the climax of difficulties which had seemed to beset them with increasing frequency.

Neither could say just when their troubles had started. Back when they'd graduated from the Academy, stalwart, fresh-faced, eager, a cop knew what he was supposed to do. It wasn't easy to be a cop in those days. The Academy always had more applicants than it could handle. But if a guy got in and made the grade, he knew he was a man among men when he put on the blue and pinned on his badge.

A cop's duties were clear-cut. He enforced the law and kept the peace. He stopped guys from beating their wives. He read the riot act to mixed-up kids and steered them into PAL. He broke up fights and returned lost children to their mamas. He put drunks in the tank to sober up and he put dope pushers in jail. His twirling nightstick was a respectful salute to the citizen and a deterrent to the thug. And when really big trouble came, he was ready to lay his life on the line for the people who looked to him for protection.

It hadn't been perfect, that old way of doing things, but at least in those days a woman could walk safely down the block to visit a neighbor after dark. And in that memory-misted era there'd only been one thing worse than a cop killer. That was the rogue cop, the bad apple who got in the barrel, the man who disgraced the blue.

But time, in passing, had worked its habitual, insidious little changes. They came creeping—the new-style court decisions, the oblique legal interpretations, the rewritten regulations. Worst of all was the warping and twisting of the image—the cop as predator instead of protector, the cop as a bully, as the instrument of brutality. Chip by chip a man's sense of

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self-identification was eroded, until he awoke one day with a feeling of hardly recognizing himself and a dread of the upcoming tour of duty.

At last Osteen and Buckwald, by now years-long partners in car 17, watched with bewilderment as demerits piled up on their records. They broke up a pot party without a search warrant: demerit. They stopped a known criminal on the sidewalk and relieved him of a .45-caliber automatic and a switchblade knife: stiff lecture by Lieutenant Devlin, their new young superior, on the current interpretation of a cop's right of search and seizure. They drew their guns to persuade a guy to stop terrorizing a rooming house with the business end of a broken beer bottle: demerit—use of undue force in effecting arrest.

The harried pair sweated out the self-acceptance of being addressed as "Pig!" instead of "Officer." They went to court in off-duty hours to appear as witnesses against thugs they'd arrested, and watched patently guilty men swagger out on legal technicalities.

The line, once so clearly drawn, obscured to nothingness with the case of Johnson vs. Osteen-Buckwald. The unhappy incident had occurred almost three months ago. Johnson was a known deviate. Osteen and Buckwald had spotted him enticing a little girl into his car with candy.

They'd put the collar on the creep, and Buckwald, unable to endure Johnson's torrent of vile language in the presence of the frightened little girl, finally smacked Johnson in the mouth. Next thing they knew, Osteen and Buckwald found themselves in the dock, charged with police brutality, while on the other side of the fence a well-heeled Johnson smirked with his battery of lawyers, and reporters' flash bulbs went off all over the place.

The verdict was acquittal, with a sharp reprimand from the bench. The aftermath was a despairing lecture from Lieutenant Devlin—and another demerit.

By now Osteen's cast-iron stomach was rusty in spots. Buckwald, who'd once been able to sleep like a hibernating bear, would as often as not mark on duty tired and gritty-eyed.

Over warm beers in Osteen's kitchen the pair decided to try and stick it out. There was a job still to be done. They knew nothing else. And they were near retirement.

Then a month ago trouble had erupted at the junior college. A small group of radical students had chased the dean from his office, set his papers on fire, and barricaded themselves in a science lab on the second floor. From there they threatened to use their knowledge of chemistry to concoct bombs and booby traps for the

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building unless their demands were met.

Called for duty in the emergency squad hastily summoned to meet the situation, Osteen and Buckwald chased and caught the student leader at the top of a third-floor stairway. Coming back down, the youth had suddenly wrenched from their grasp. In headlong flight he'd tripped and fallen, plunging down the last dozen stairs.

The boy had suffered a mild concussion and a broken arm. Osteen and Buckwald had hurried down to aid him, then fallen back before a group of charging students who screamed that they'd seen the Pigs throw their leader down the stairway.

No demerit this time.

Lieutenant Devlin, rangy, lean, and clean-cut, had looked from the window of his office at the torch-lit scene on the street below. Nearly two hundred students had leaped at the chance of heightened drama, transferring their protest demonstration from the college to police headquarters.

Letting the window drapery fall from his fingers, Devlin had turned again to face Osteen and Buckwald. The pair stood just beyond his desk, old blocks of hickory frozen to attention.

"I want you men to understand." Devlin had looked a bit peaked. "I believe your version of what happened, personally. But more than my personal feelings are at stake here, or yours. If we permit this thing to come before the civilian review board we'll play right into the hands of those young radicals. They'll make a field day of it."

Devlin had paused. Osteen and Buckwald had noted the first hint of bitterness in his eyes; but right now Osteen and Buckwald were void of sympathy. They anticipated Devlin's course of action, and they couldn't help thinking that in the old days their lieutenant would have backed them to the hilt, provided they hadn't transgressed.

"In modern society every situation has its ramifications, complications, shades of gray, and necessities for expedience." Devlin had sat at his desk and looked at a point somewhere beyond the heads of Osteen and Buckwald. "We have to view the whole picture, negotiate, compromise. We have to think of our public image. We can't just sweep this thing under the rug."

Jaw muscles bunched in the faces of Osteen and Buckwald as if they were not aware of anything that needed sweeping under a rug.

"We'll have to get the right kind of publicity release in the hands of the press," Devlin had said.

Osteen had decided to cut the torment short by getting it over and done with. "How long are

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we suspended, Lieutenant?"

"One month," Devlin had said. "That should neutralize the review board, deprive the students of ammunition, and smooth the whole thing over nicely."

Nicely hell, Osteen and Buckwald said to themselves for thirty straight days.

On the twenty-eighth day Osteen was hocking his watch because there wasn't food in his house and his credit was stretched thin. While Osteen was in the pawnshop, Buckwald showed up with his fine old guitar, he being a middling amateur country-western baritone.

"You too," Osteen had said.

"The Patrolman's Benevolent Association offered some help, but I'll go it on my own as long as I can."

"I know what you mean," Osteen had said.

The two had got their money and pawn tickets. Out on the sidewalk they'd paused. "I'm a camel with a busted back," Buckwald had said. "Come on over to the house this evening. I got an idea I want to talk over with you."

The uncanny rapport that had developed over the years between them crackled. "I think I dig you, Bucky. We've had a whole month for remembering and thinking."

"No peanuts," Buckwald had said.

"No, it's the big caper. That's my vote. We sure got the know-how and we'll sure get the opportunity."

"No hurting the nice folks, though. They already got headaches enough, what with inflation, taxes, and hoodlums running loose."

"That's right. Just the punks who get rich abusing the system."

"We'll draw us up a list," Buckwald had said . . .

And a profitable list it was turning out to be, Osteen remarked, after he'd added the Syndicate-Chastain loot to the bus-station locker.

That day Buckwald snored like a contented bruin, and Osteen dined on pigs knuckles and kraut without disturbing the rust in his stomach in the slightest.

Both glowed with man-sized zest and vigor when they marked on duty that night. And car 17 rolled up the ramp from the police garage at 10:59 p.m.

On the knell of midnight Hervie Alder locked his somewhat seedy drug store in an older, blue-collar neighborhood. He turned and scouted the dark lonely street. Then he crossed diagonally toward a parking lot adjacent to a tumbledown service-station garage.

His footsteps echoed in the silence. He was the last businessman in the neighborhood to close. All about him the old houses and second-rate stores

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were quiet, peaceful, steeped in sleep.

Hervie was a short plump fellow with a round lardy face in which the eyes protruded and seemed to stare outwardly in different directions.

Life hadn't always treated him kindly. From the time he could remember he'd always seemed to be running hard just to keep up. He'd been a poor student and as athletic as a pop-eyed frog. His classmates had called him Humpty Dumpty, even to the day he was graduated from college.

Then a few years ago Humpty had discovered a new view from his wall. It was terrific, including a home in swanky Dellwood, with a swimming pool and all the trimmings, vacation trips to Paris and Rome, lovely young things who didn't mind selling their souls for an older man's gold, and the steel-gray Lincoln Continental that Hervie was now unlocking.

He slid beneath the steering wheel with a grunt of contentment, and was slipping the key toward the ignition lock when the cold muzzle of a gun eased across the back of the seat and pressed against Hervie's medulla oblongata.

The keys clinked from Hervie's nerveless fingers. All his vital organs stopped working for a split second. He hadn't the strength to pull the base of his skull away from the gun.

"That's fine, you little slug," a deep voice rumbled from the back seat. "Nice and easy. Keep it that way."

Hervie found a shred of his voice. "My car—it was locked."

"Minor point, pal. I've seen ways of getting in and out of a locked car you've never dreamed of. Now let's open the door quiet and slow, go back across the street, unlock your place of business, and vacuum out the safe."

Hervie summoned his will power and strength. He strained his head around until he was looking obliquely at the shadowy figure in back. He almost wished he hadn't. In the street glow he saw a fearsome image with features warped out of human semblance by the pressure of a nylon stocking mask.

"I'm just a poor druggist in a beatup end of town," Hervie pleaded. "Just look at my crummy place over there. I'm carrying all I've got in my wallet. Take it—the car—my ring, you can have that too."

"You're a slimy worm, and the law's never been able to close all the loopholes," the bandit said. "But I know you're the king bee of the drug traffic in this bailiwick. Fellow who buys uncut heroin in wholesale lots has to have working capital like he was the Federal Reserve. So let's move, pal. You got no choice.

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You're going to cough it up."

Osteen drove cruiser 17 around a dark corner before he turned on the headlights. By that time Buckwald, in back, had stripped off the disguise, crawled up front, and settled himself beside his partner.

They drove a few blocks in silent communion.

"I left Hervie Alder locked in a basement storage room," Buckwald remarked at last. "No sweat again this time."

"I dig," Osteen agreed. "But why stretch our luck?"

"Yeah, it ain't like we was greedy."

Osteen turned the cruiser in the direction of the bus station where Buckwald would quietly deposit the third money-loaded suitcase in the locker.

An hour later, rid of the money and disguise, Osteen sidled car 17 curb-side two blocks from Hervie Alder's drug store.

Buckwald lifted the two-way microphone. He spoke into it crisply. "Car seventeen! Seventeen calling headquarters!"

"Come in, seventeen."

Buckwald gave their location. "We spotted the Nylon Stocking Bandit! Need help. Cordon the area. We are investigating."

"Acknowledged, seventeen." The cool headquarters voice immediately began dispatching three additional cruisers to the neighborhood.

Buckwald returned the mike to its clip and exchanged a brief grin with Osteen. The car swept forward and began prowling the area in a very businesslike fashion, spotlight probing alleys and dark doorways.

Headquarters coordinated the movements of the cars. The jaws of the trap closed slowly, until at last all four cars were clustered half a block from Hervie Alder's drug store.

"I guess we must've lost him," Buckwald radioed in lamely.

"Okay," headquarters said, "break it up." The cool voice gave instructions that sent the cars in different directions on fresh assignments—a night club brawl, a shooting, a late party disturbing some neighbors, a head-on collision with serious injuries.

"Plenty to keep everybody busy tonight," Osteen said.

"Ain't it the truth?" Buckwald agreed.

At four o'clock the next afternoon Osteen and Buckwald created a minor surprise at headquarters when they appeared, scrubbed and starched, in civilian clothes. They requested an audience with Lieutenant Devlin and fifteen minutes later were standing awkwardly in front of his desk. They cleared their throats, shuffled their felt hats in their hands, and kept urging each other with their eyes to be the first to speak.

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Devlin rocked back in his swivel chair, spearing them with impatient glances. "Well, what is it?"

Osteen and Buckwald said in the same breath, "Lieutenant, we—"

They broke off and Osteen said, "You tell him, Bucky."

Devlin tilted his head, his eyes pinching at their corners. "Tell me what?"

"Well, it's this way, sir," Buckwald said. "Me and Osteen, we got a little confession to make—about last night."

Devlin's chair snapped forward.

Buckwald's look pleaded with Osteen for help.

Osteen moistened his lips. "What he means, Lieutenant, is that we didn't mention one thing in our report. We had that Nylon Stocking Bandit practically in our mitts. Then we lost him completely and had to call in for help. We goofed again."

"We was trying very hard, sir," Buckwald said, "to do it right this time. We spotted this yegg, all dolled up in his costume. No mistake about him being the right man. We closed in. We was explaining all about his rights to keep silent and have a lawyer when he busts loose and runs away."

Devlin's eyes glittered. He picked up a ballpoint as if he needed something very hard to grip.

"Naturally we took out after him," Osteen said, "but we ain't as young as we once was, and we was never sprinters. We yelled at him to stop but he didn't, and we couldn't decide whether it would be undue force in making an arrest if we took a pot shot at him. So while we're trying to decide, this yegg ducks down a dark alley and just disappears. It was then we called in for help."

"But a brush like that ought to scare him off for good," Buckwald suggested. "I can almost guarantee the guy will never bother this town again."

Devlin vented a tired sigh, shook his head, and composed himself to a certain fatigued tolerance as he looked at them.

"We're real sorry, Lieutenant," Buckwald said. "It's just that we're like a pair of old-time harness makers at the time when cars were running all the horses off the roads."

"We've tried. Honest, we've tried," Osteen added. "We just don't cut it. So we've talked it over and decided to quit. We'll be working our notice, starting tonight."

Devlin's eyes perked up. "We'll be sorry to lose you." His voice sounded sincere, but Osteen and Buckwald sensed his relief at having a pair of old has-beens out of his crinkly young hair. "But where will you boys go, what will you do?"

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"To Florida, maybe or California," Osteen said. "Some place where there's plenty of sunshine."

"Our kids are grown and left home," Osteen pointed out. "Just us and the wives. We'll manage."

Devlin stood up and reached across the desk to shake their hands. "Well, good luck, fellows, wherever you go."

"Thank you, Lieutenant."

Moments later the pair were marching across the police parking lot to Osteen's dilapidated sedan. The sun was warm, the sky blue. It certainly was a beautiful day.

They got in, and Osteen drove the car out of the lot toward their neighborhood.

"By the way, Bucky," Osteen said a few blocks later, "exactly how much did you say we totaled?"

"Four hundred and fifty-one thousand dollars," Buckwald said, lighting a half-dollar cigar for the first time in his life.

"How about that?" Osteen said. "You know, I kinda like nice round numbers."

"Me too." Buckwald let smoke curl aromatically up around his fleshy nose and caress the creases around his eyes.

"Why don't we package the odd grand and mail it as an anonymous contribution to the Patrolman's Benevolent Association?" Osteen inquired.

"I was just about to make the same suggestion myself," Buckwald seconded. He blew a couple of fat luxuriant smoke rings. "I can't think of any charitable organization that needs it more."

DON'T MISS

next month's 30th Anniversary Issue

(see page 161)

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Charles Gilroy was faced with a problem. But then he'd had an equally difficult problem once before, and some problems are easier to solve the second time around . . .

MUG'S GAME

by E. E. ROBERTS

THE LETTER CAME WITH THE regular morning mail, but because the envelope was marked personal, Charles Gilroy's secretary didn't open it. Being feminine and curious, though, she put it on top of the stack of mail that she brought in to him.

When Gilroy didn't look up immediately from the pad he was figuring cost estimates on, she cleared her throat. "There's one marked for you personally, Mr. Gilroy," she said. "I put it on top because I thought it might be important."

"Oh," Charles Gilroy said, blinking at her, "is there?" He put down his pencil, reached over and picked the envelope out of his In basket. He gazed curiously at the unfamiliar handwriting before slitting the envelope with his forefinger.

The message inside was neatly written; it had neither salutation nor signature:

Isn't it nice that your wife has found a companion for those long nights you have to work? For more information and a possible solution to your problem be at The Blue Dog at noon today.

Gilroy's hands closed convulsively around the flimsy sheet of paper. Then, remembering that his secretary was still watching him, he composed himself and forced his hands to go through the motions of crumpling the note slowly and deliberately. "Another sales pitch," he said, throwing the wad of paper carelessly into the wastebasket beside his desk. "Uh, look, Betty," he said, waving a hand vaguely to indicate the rest of the mail, "give me a few minutes to go through all this stuff and then I'll call you if there's any dictation to be done." He made himself smile and hoped it didn't look as false as it felt.

The girl gazed at him oddly, but she said, "Yes, sir," and left.

As soon as the door to his private office had closed behind her, Gilroy bent swiftly, retrieved the note from the wastebasket,

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and smoothed it out on the desk before him.

There could be no mistaking its meaning, of course. And he wasn't really surprised that it had come. No man his age—50—married to a woman 25 years his junior could really be surprised to learn that she was betraying him. Especially when he'd known from the start that it was his money that Claire had found most attractive about him. That's what Ruth couldn't understand—how he could love a woman he knew didn't love him. Poor fat stupid Ruth, sinking placidly into middle age and wondering why he couldn't do the same.

He was sorry about Ruth. But he had to have Claire—he simply had to. Claire was young and exciting. And she made him feel alive and virile for the first time in years. No wonder he had fallen in love with her.

The hell of it was that he still loved her.

The Blue Dog was a small hole-in-the-wall bar and grill about eight blocks from Gilroy's office building. And although he had told himself all morning that he wasn't going to do it, promptly on the stroke of twelve Gilroy was walking down the short flight of steps that led to its door. He paused with his hand on the door.

He knew that by going inside he would be admitting his willingness to believe in his wife's infidelity and thereby make himself vulnerable to whatever scheme the anonymous writer had in mind. And no doubt it would be a costly one—in one way or another.

But to stay away would leave too many questions unanswered, and Gilroy was honest enough with himself to realize that he would have no peace until he had those answers. He squared his thin shoulders, pushed the door open resolutely, and went in.

The interior was dim, smoky, and decorated in a quasi-hippie style. Bright psychedelic posters lined the walls and various objects left over from a rummage sale of the 1930's hung from the ceiling. There was even an ancient barber's chair in one corner in which presently a fat young man sat, complacently holding a huge mug of beer.

Gilroy shuddered. The prices would be inflated, he suspected, and the food execrable. But at least he wasn't likely to run into any of his friends here.

He picked out one of the sturdier-looking tables, sat down, and pretended to busy himself with the menu.

A hand reached over his shoulder to pluck the menu away from him while another hand set a glass in front of him.

"Here," a confident male voice

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said, "you look like a man who could use a drink if I ever saw one."

Charles Gilroy blinked, genuinely startled. A tall man dressed in a dark double-breasted jacket set with parallel rows of gleaming brass buttons beamed down at him with cynical self-assurance.

"Go ahead," the tall man said. "It's good Scotch. And Scotch *is* your drink, isn't it, Mr. Gilroy?"

Gilroy swallowed hard. "You seem to have the advantage of me," he said stiffly.

The tall man's grin broadened. "That's right," he said. "I did forget to sign my letter, didn't I? Well, we can remedy that very easily." He swung the chair opposite Gilroy away from the table and sat down with easy muscular grace. "My name's Frank Comstock. We've never met, but I think we have a mutual acquaintance." Comstock's eyes glittered with amusement. "Your wife."

Gilroy bit his lip. "You're a very brazen young man," he said.

"Am I?"

"Yes. I could call the police, you know."

Comstock smiled mockingly. "Oh, come now, Mr. Gilroy," he said. "We both know you aren't going to do that. And if you did, what would you tell them? That I sent you an anonymous letter? So what? Did I threaten you in it or demand money?"

"You're very clever."

"Yes," Comstock agreed, "I am."

He turned to signal the miniskirted waitress, and Gilroy used the moments of respite to study his adversary more closely. He found little to reassure him. Comstock was a good-looking man with strong features saved from collar-ad regularity by a slight flattening at the tip of his nose. His dark hair, contrary to current fashion, was clipped short and ran back from high on his forehead in tight smooth waves. There was a slight sprinkling of gray around the temples that added a mature, almost a distinguished, touch.

Gilroy's own hair—what was left of it—was a nondescript ginger.

"A Scotch to match my friend's there," Comstock told the waitress. He watched her legs appreciatively as she walked away, then turned back to Gilroy. "You know," he said, "I almost feel sorry for you." The remark infuriated Gilroy more than anything he could have said, but he appeared not to notice. "You get rid of one wife to marry Claire," he went on, "and then she turns around and plays you for a sucker."

Gilroy tensed. "My first wife died," he said in a carefully controlled voice, "in an automobile accident."

"Yes," Comstock said, "of

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course. But wasn't there some question at the time as to whether it really was an accident?"

"There was an investigation," Gilroy said in the same controlled voice. "There always is in such cases. At the end of it the police concluded that my wife's death was accidental."

"How fortunate for you," Comstock said quietly. Then he smiled suddenly before Gilroy could reply. "But then we didn't come here to dwell on your past misfortunes. Sufficient unto the day—if you know what I mean."

"I think we both know what you mean," Gilroy said grimly. He waited until the waitress had set down Comstock's drink and departed. "You mentioned a solution, though," he said.

Comstock picked up his glass and swished the ice around. "Yes, I did, didn't I?" he said. He took a sip of the Scotch. "Excellent," he said, putting down the glass. "Now let me see, what were we talking about? Oh, yes. The solution to your problem." He stopped smiling. "It's very simple," he said. "You pay me $25,000 and I guarantee your wife will never see her lover again."

Gilroy regarded Comstock levelly. "And how could you guarantee that?" he said.

The mocking smile was back in place, ready for the question. "Do you really have to ask, Mr. Gilroy?"

"No," Gilroy said. "If I understand the situation correctly, you are my wife's lover. And you are telling me that for $25,000 you'll leave her alone."

Comstock inclined his head slightly. "You're very perceptive," he said.

"And you're very vile."

"Well, yes," Comstock said equably, sitting back in his chair and crossing his legs, "I suppose from your point of view I am. But I do have to live, you know. And while Claire is appreciative"—he thrust out his wrist to display a gold watch—"her resources are limited." Comstock shrugged and looked at Gilroy with mock pathos. "So I really have no choice but to look to you."

Gilroy stood up suddenly, almost upsetting the small table. "I'll think about it," he said.

"You do that," Comstock said, unruffled. "Only don't think too long. Otherwise I might grow too fond of Claire ever to leave her. You know what I mean?"

"Yes," Gilroy said tightly and stalked out of the restaurant.

At the door he caught a last glimpse of Comstock reaching calmly across the table to pick up his, Gilroy's, untasted drink.

Back at the office that afternoon Gilroy did think about Comstock's proposition. And quickly rejected it.

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To go along, he decided, would be a mug's game. Comstock was easily capable of taking the money and then continuing to see Claire—or of using the money to run off with her. Even if Comstock did keep his word and give up Claire, there was always the possibility that Claire would find another lover. Probability, in fact, Gilroy conceded.

So what choices did that leave him? Not many really, but Gilroy was a methodical man. He sat back in his chair and reviewed them one by one.

He could, of course, simply do nothing. Conceivably, Comstock could leave Claire for more promising pastures when he saw that his scheme hadn't worked. But more likely he would try to force the issue in some way. And Gilroy knew that he himself couldn't let the situation remain unchanged. He'd paid heavily for Claire, and he wanted all of her—not just a part.

Then, he could threaten Claire with divorce unless *she* gave up Comstock. But it would be a hollow threat and Claire would know it. He couldn't bear to part with her, not after all he had gone through to get her.

No, when you came right down to it, there was only one possible solution. He had to get rid of Comstock, kill him. And preferably in such a way that Claire was forced to be his accomplice.

Gilroy was surprised at how easily he had reached his decision. Deciding to kill Ruth had been a much harder one.

That evening after dinner Gilroy went directly to his study, settled down in his favorite chair, and made a great show of reading the newspaper. A few moments later his wife came in.

"Won't you be late for your meeting?" she said.

"I'm not going," Gilroy said gruffly from behind the paper. "I canceled it."

Claire laid her hand on his shoulder. "I'm glad," she said. "It'll be nice to have an evening together for a change. I see so little of you these days."

Gilroy felt a wild surge of hope. Perhaps Comstock had been bluffing. Perhaps there was nothing between him and Claire after all and it had been just some wild con game.

He put his hand up to cover Claire's and squeezed gently. She smiled, disengaged her hand, and left the room. Gilroy smiled after her.

Five minutes later, though, he heard her on the phone in the next room. She must have forgotten that she had left the door to the study open or she would have used one of the other extensions, Gilroy thought as he strained his ears to make out the words.

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"... off for tonight," Claire was saying. "He's staying home ... I know, I'm disappointed too. But he can't stay home every night. And if he does I can always come to you." She laughed brightly. "I do too," she said and hung up.

Gilroy waited until he had heard her move off to some other part of the house, then he reopened his paper with a snap. So be it, he thought.

As usual on the evenings when he was home, the Gilroys retired early. But Gilroy didn't sleep. He forced himself to lie unmoving until he heard the clock downstairs strike twelve. Then he counted slowly to 500 and sat bolt upright in bed.

"Did you hear that?" he said in a harsh whisper.

Claire stirred uneasily and mumbled something. Gilroy shook her shoulder briskly.

"Wake up," he said. "There's a prowler outside."

Claire rose on one elbow. "What?" she said. Her voice was still fuzzy with sleep.

"Shh. There it is again."

Fully awake now and more than slightly alarmed, Claire listened intently. "There's nothing," she said at last, reaction to her own earlier alarm adding an impatient edge to her voice. "Go back to sleep. You were just dreaming."

Gilroy shook his head stubbornly. "No," he said, "I heard it. And I'm not taking any chances. I'm calling the police."

Claire flopped back on the bed and wrapped the covers determinedly around her. "All right," she said. "Make a fool of yourself for all I care. I'm staying here."

But a few minutes later she got up, pulled on her robe, and followed him downstairs to wait for the police.

When they came there were two of them—a corporal who identified himself as Edward Norris and a patrolman named Carmody. Both were very polite and on their best behavior with Gilroy. But neither was really convinced that this was more than a wild goose chase. And Claire's open skepticism as she sat on the arm of the sofa swinging a slippered foot, while her husband told his story, did nothing to persuade them otherwise. In fact, Carmody, the younger of the two, seemed more interested in the leg leading to the slipper than in Gilroy's recital.

Nevertheless, business was business and Norris waited in the living room with Gilroy and Claire while Carmody scouted around outside with a flashlight.

When Carmody came back a few minutes later, Norris said, "Find anything?"

"Some marks on the French doors at the side," Carmody said. "Could have been a prowler."

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Norris looked at Gilroy with new respect. "You must have scared him off when you turned on the lights," he said.

Gilroy smiled inwardly. He'd made those marks himself when he'd locked up for the night. "I can't say I'm sorry," he said, "even though I know you would have preferred to catch him in the act." He shuddered. "You never can tell what a prowler will do once he gets inside."

"No," Norris agreed, "it doesn't pay to take any chances." He resettled his hat on his head. "In any case we'll drive around the neighborhood for a while to see if we spot anybody suspicious. I doubt if he'll bother you again tonight. But if he does, don't hesitate. Call us. It's what we're there for."

"I will," Gilroy promised. His face was expressionless, but he was smiling broadly inside. So far everything had gone exactly the way he'd planned it. And he saw no reason to believe it wouldn't continue to do so.

Tomorrow night or the night after or the night after that at the latest, the "prowler" would return. Only the next time he would get into the house and Gilroy would kill him.

The prowler, of course, would be Comstock.

Gilroy closed the door after the two policemen and turned back to his wife. "I guess it's safe to go back to bed now," he said.

Claire tossed and turned the rest of the night, but Gilroy slept soundly until morning.

The next day at the office he debated whether to play out the charade once more that night or to act. In the end he decided to act. The sooner it was over and done with the better. The decision made, he put it out of his mind and concentrated on his work.

That evening after dinner Gilroy went through the familiar routine of stuffing papers into his attaché case.

"Do you have to go out this evening?" Claire said.

"I'm afraid so," Gilroy said, closing the case and snapping the latch. "Some business that can't be put off any longer." As he said it he was struck by the unconscious truth of his words. "After all," he couldn't resist adding, "you knew I couldn't stay home forever."

"I suppose so," Claire said, "but you can't stop me from hoping anyway."

Gilroy marveled at the wistfulness she had managed to inject into her voice.

She walked with him to the door, kissed him goodbye, and even stood in the open doorway waving as he drove off. But Gilroy had no doubts that as soon as the door was closed she would

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hurry to the phone to call Comstock. Which again fell right in with Gilroy's plan. He smiled again at how perfectly it was working.

Once out of sight of the house, Gilroy pulled off the long winding drive that led to the main road and backed his car skillfully behind a stand of trees. Satisfied that he was effectively screened from anyone passing, he turned off the lights and motor and settled down to wait.

He hadn't long. About twenty minutes later a car whipped past him on its way to his house. It was too dark for Gilroy to identify the driver, but it was the kind of car he'd expect Comstock to drive—fast, sporty, expensive. Gilroy wondered bitterly who had paid for it. The old rich husband of some other restless young wife?

Not that it mattered really. After tonight nothing would matter so far as Comstock was concerned. And Claire would realize for once and all that he would settle for nothing less than all of her.

Gilroy waited another five minutes, then took a revolver from the glove compartment. Even though he'd loaded it himself that afternoon, he checked the cylinder carefully before sticking it in his jacket pocket and getting out of the car to begin the walk back to the house.

It was an uphill climb and treacherous underfoot. More than once Gilroy regretted that he'd had to leave his car. But the sound of the engine in the drive would have alerted Claire and Comstock and above all he wanted to take them by surprise. Given that advantage it would be a simple matter to herd Comstock to the proper spot at the point of a gun and shoot him.

Gilroy realized that the success of his plan hinged on Claire's backing up his claim that Comstock had broken into the house. But knowing Claire, he considered her testimony the main strength of his plan rather than a weakness. If she had to choose between money and love, Claire would choose money every time. And she'd know that he'd have plenty of time between arrest and trial—if it came to that—to change his will and reduce her dower rights to a minimum.

Gilroy paused at the edge of the woods to catch his breath. The house was dark except for a single light upstairs and that too went out while he watched. Rage gripped him and he shuddered. Then it passed and he was icy calm again.

He cut across the lawn dappled with moonlight and shade to the French doors he'd so carefully marked for the police. Kneeling, he pulled out a pair of thin gloves, took a roll of adhesive tape from his pocket, and began to lace

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strips of the tape back and forth across one of the small panes. As soon as the pane was completely covered he tossed the half-empty roll to one side and tapped the pane sharply with the butt of his pistol.

The glass broke with surprisingly little noise. There was a slight tinkle from inside as one or two shattered fragments fell to the floor, but the bulk clung to the tape just as the book had said they would. Charles Gilroy smiled and began to work three sides of the tape loose. When he finished he lowered the resulting flap gently and reached inside to unlock the door.

He pulled it open quietly and entered the house. Just inside the door he slipped off his shoes, then padded silently across the floor.

He was almost at the foot of the stairs when the beam of a flashlight caught him square in the face, blinding him.

"I must say, Charles," Claire said, "that you've made things very easy for me. But then you always were entirely predictable." She held the flashlight unwaveringly, raised the small nickeled automatic she held in her other hand, and fired.

In the few milliseconds of life left to him, Gilroy realized just why he had been sent that letter. Then the bullet pierced his heart and he fell heavily.

Comstock at the head of the stairs flicked on the lights. He wet his lips and smiled nervously at Claire. "I'd better get out of here, I guess," he said. His face was unnaturally pale and waxy.

"Yes," Claire said tonelessly, not looking at him. She waited until she heard him start his car and drive off. Then she walked slowly over to the telephone and dialed zero.

"Operator," she said, "there's been a terrible accident. I've just mistaken my husband for a prowler."

DON'T MISS

next month's 30th Anniversary Issue

(see page 161)

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advance comments on

A STUDY IN SURMISE

by MICHAEL HARRISON

"I congratulate Michael Harrison and believe he has made a major discovery in Sherlockian documentation."

VINCENT STARRETT,
the world's foremost Sherlockian

"*A Study in Surmise* is certainly one of the major serious contributions to the Science of Holmesiology."

HOWARD HAYCRAFT,
the world's foremost historian
of the detective story

"I didn't think there could possibly be any interesting new research about Sherlock Holmes, but Michael Harrison has actually done it."

REX STOUT,
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"A rare item indeed — a new discovery in the Sherlockian field . . . well documented theories — it may not be wrong to call them proven facts — about the origin of Sherlock Holmes — and all entirely new!"

DR. JULIAN WOLFF,
Commissionaire of
The Baker Street Irregulars

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a *major* DISCOVERY *in*

SHERLOCKIANA

by MICHAEL HARRISON

In the Introduction to Ellery Queen's suppressed anthology, *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1944), we wrote: "Someone has said that more has been written *about* Sherlock Holmes than about any other character in fiction. It is further true that more has been written about Holmes *by others* than by Doyle himself." As the years pass since the first Sherlock Holmes story was published—*A Study in Scarlet* (1887)—the two statements quoted above become more and more incontestable. Indeed, many Sherlockian devotees may have wondered if *anything new* can still be written about the creation of Sherlock Holmes—hasn't *everything* already been said?

The answer is no: not all has been learned, and not all will ever be learned. The well of speculation and conjecture is bottomless, and research about Sherlock Holmes will never die, or even fade away. The interest, perhaps the fanaticism, in the creative sources of Sherlock Holmes is eternal.

And now Michael Harrison, author of *In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes* (1958) and reviver of Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin, in the series of splendid pastiches which have been appearing in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, has engaged in some new and remarkable research, tracking down hitherto unknown and *unsuspected* origins of The Great Detective, and

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has come up with what we unhesitatingly describe as the most important discovery in Sherlockiana of the past decade, perhaps of the past quarter of a century. No, we'll go even further: perhaps the most important Holmesian discovery possible to have been made since the death in 1930 of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the only one who knew all the Sherlockian answers . . .

As you know we rarely bring you nonfiction—not even, on the average, once a year; but we think "A Study in Surmise" is so exceptional that you really shouldn't miss it . . .

A STUDY IN SURMISE

by MICHAEL HARRISON

1. *Dr. Conan Doyle Reads "The Times"*

In 1881 a German baker disappeared in London. In that year there were literally hundreds of German-born bakers plying their useful trade in the metropolis of the British Empire, though generally in its less fashionable quarters. There were also many other mysterious disappearances, some of them even more mysterious than that of the German baker (in whose vanishing his wife's lover was suspected of having had a hand). But the disappearance of Urban Napoleon Stanger, last seen at 11:55 P.M. on November 12, 1881, outside his bakery at 136 Lever Street, St. Luke's, was destined to become one of the most widely publicized mysteries of late Victorian times, and to be featured by every British newspaper, from *The Times* to *Lloyd's Sunday Newspaper,* as "The St. Luke's Mystery."

Hardly a fortnight before Herr Stanger stepped out of the knowledge of men, a young Irish doctor, only recently qualified as Bachelor of Medicine and Master of Surgery, stood on the deck of the S.S. Mayumba, a cargo-and-passenger vessel out of Liverpool for the West Coast of Africa. Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle, qualified but otherwise down on his luck, had shipped as surgeon on the Mayumba. He was not in England when Stanger vanished; by the time the Mayumba tied up again in Liverpool, in mid-January 1882, Stanger had been missing some two months, and steps of a private nature had already been taken to find him.

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But it was not until September 1882 that a newspaper account of an arrest in The St. Luke's Mystery informed Dr. Conan Doyle, and most of Britain, that there had been such a man as Urban Napoleon Stanger. Yet, as I shall try to prove, nothing that Dr. Conan Doyle was ever to read in the course of his long life would have the profound influence on his career that the first account of The St. Luke's Mystery was to have for him. I shall suggest that it is in this nine days' wonder that we must look for the origins of Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes story, and—even more important—that it is the character of an obscure private detective, brought into momentary prominence by the The St. Luke's Mystery, on which Conan Doyle modeled a major part of the world's most famous fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes.

Now, let me make one thing clear. I do not put forward here any theory that, in *A Study in Scarlet,* Conan Doyle was attempting a solution to the Stanger mystery. What I *am* suggesting is that the reading of the long reports in *The Times* and elsewhere of The St. Luke's Mystery inspired Conan Doyle to try his hand at a detective story ("the first completed long story which I ever wrote," he tells us), and in proof of my contention I shall demonstrate that names in *A Study in Scarlet* echo again and again those in the real-life St. Luke's Mystery, while incidents in the real-life drama are unmistakably reflected in the story's setting and events.

For those readers who may have forgotten the details of *A Study in Scarlet,* as well as for those who may have never read the story which gave Sherlock Holmes to a grateful world, here, briefly, is the plot.

Dr. John H. Watson, unemployed ex-Army medico, invalided out of the Service with a bullet wound, is introduced to Sherlock Holmes, "a private consulting detective," by Watson's chance-met acquaintance from the old days, "young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Barts."

Holmes and Watson, both searching for suitable lodgings, agree to share "diggings" in a first-floor set of rooms in Baker Street, London. Watson, interested in Holmes's mysterious activities as a private consulting detective, accompanies Holmes, on March 4, 1881—Watson's date—to an empty house "in Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road," where the body of an American, "Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A.," has been found dead.

Drebber's secretary, Joseph Stangerson, is missing, and the police hunt for him as the supposed murderer, until he too is found dead.

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Holmes, who has been called into the case by two police inspectors from Scotland Yard, now proves that the two dead men were Mormons, fleeing the vengeance of a certain Jefferson Hope, whose betrothed the hunted men had ruined and killed in what British readers of the day had no difficulty in accepting as a typical Mormonish way. Jefferson Hope, the man living only for vengeance, is tracked down and arrested by Holmes, but the murderer escapes the gallows by dying of an aortic aneurism—though not before he has confirmed the accuracy of Holmes's reasoning.

So much for the plot of *A Study in Scarlet*. Now let us see to what extent it owes its inspiration to the events arising from Urban Napoleon Stanger's disappearance on November 12, 1881.

2. *A Baker Vanishes*

At the time of his disappearance Urban Napoleon Stanger was 36. His wife, Elisabeth, also German, was a year younger. His manager, Franz Felix Stumm, who also had a shop of his own, was a year younger than Mrs. Stanger. Stumm, too, was of German birth.

That Stanger was in debt seems proved; that, as Stumm afterward claimed, Stanger owed Stumm money was never conclusively proved —at least, not to the satisfaction of Mr. Justice Hawkins and the jury at the Old Bailey Criminal Court.

Until 1881 Stanger had been living and doing business at 64 Cable Street, in what Londoners now call "the East End." But in the year of his total vanishing Stanger shifted home and bakery to the hardly more fashionable quarter of St. Luke's, about a mile from Cable Street.

Perhaps a desire to remove himself from the neighborhood of too-pressing creditors was the reason for Stanger's uprooting himself. It must have been a powerful reason which induced him to do so, for, in leaving Cable Street, Stanger left behind him friendly compatriots: not only his old German acquaintance, George Geisel, baker, of 23 Baker's Row, Whitechapel, but also the German owners of nearby taverns—such men as Ernst Scheel, landlord of The Hoop & Grapes, Peter Schmidt, of The Blue Anchor, and Gerd Reiners, of The Magpie Stump.

The theory that Stanger's move was in connection with an attempt to remove himself from his creditors seems to be strengthened by the fact that, though The Post Office London Directory gives his name correctly (Urban Napoleon Stanger) when his address was 64 Cable Street, the Directory for 1882—the year after his

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move—gives his name as Urbin Stinger, now of 136 Lever Street, St. Luke's. Was this a clumsy attempt at name altering for the purpose of hiding his identity? (What is curious about the change in the name is that "to sting," in English slang, means "to swindle." Had Stanger, then, a sense of humor?)

At any rate, whether as Stanger or as Stinger, this was the last time that the German baker was to appear in the classified sections of The Post Office London Directory. When the time came for the 1883 edition to be made ready, even the owners of the Directory knew that Stanger was no longer to be included among the active German bakers of London . . .

As I said, it was at 11:55 P.M. on November 12, 1881 that Stanger was last seen alive. Christian Zintler, a baker employed by Stanger, was going home to his lodgings. He had just left the back door of the bakery and had turned into Lever Street when he noticed that four men were gathered on the sidewalk outside his employer's shop: Stanger; his manager Stumm; and two men whom Zintler did not know. Zintler afterward remarked that he had taken no particular notice of the four men, though he remembered that Stumm and the other two had gone off together, leaving Stanger alone on the sidewalk. Zintler, as he later testified, then saw Stanger enter the house door, adjoining the shop.

On the following morning, at 8:00 sharp, Zintler reported for work. On arriving at 136 Lever Street he was met by Mrs. Stanger, who told him to go straightway to Stumm's bakery at 131 St. John Street Road (about half a mile away) and tell the manager to come at once. This Zintler did. A fortnight later, on November 26, 1881, Mrs. Stanger told Zintler, a young man, that "as Herr Stanger had gone back to Germany," Zintler was in the future to sleep on the premises.

Around January 12, 1882, George Geisel called at 136 Lever Street to try to collect an outstanding bill for flour supplied to Stanger. Geisel was surprised to find Stumm alone in charge—surprised and disturbed to hear that Stanger was recuperating in the country, "having broken a blood vessel."

A few days later Geisel received a letter, bearing a German postmark, which, though purporting to have come from Stanger, was so clumsy a forgery that even the simple German baker was not deceived. Geisel, now deeply uneasy, returned to Lever Street and asked Stumm to give him Stanger's address. Stumm gave an address in Kreuznach, Germany.

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Now highly suspicious of Stumm and his evasions, Geisel looked around for a private inquiry agent to find the missing man. There was no dearth of such talent in the London of 1882; at least four used to advertise regularly in *The Times*: Ignatius Paul Pollacky, "Correspondent to Foreign Police Gazette"; F. Field, Private Inquiry Office ("Established 1852"); Attwood's Private & Confidential Inquiry Office; and The Confidential Inquiry Office (9 Craig's Court, Charing Cross). As Conan Doyle, with these advertisers well in mind, makes Sherlock Holmes say, in *A Study in Scarlet*: "Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones."

But, typically, Geisel went to none of these, or to any of the eight others who were listed in The Post Office London Directory for 1881 and 1882. Instead, Geisel sought out a fellow German, one Wendel Scherer, almost certainly a relative of Siegfried Scherer, of Schafer, Scherer & Co., leather merchants, of 9 Silk Street, Cripplegate, not far from St. Luke's.

Geisel empowered Scherer to offer a reward of £50 for any information which might lead to the discovery of the missing Stanger. Despite newspaper notices of the reward and what we may suppose were Scherer's diligent house-to-house inquiries, the reward money was never claimed, and after a few weeks of Scherer's "detecting," Geisel, impatient with Scherer's inefficiency (or merely his bad luck?), did what doubtless he should have done in January. Geisel went to the police.

That the police took the disappearance of Urban Napoleon Stanger so seriously—dealing with it, at once, on the highest (that is, the Scotland Yard) level—may be explained by pointing out that Britain, at that time, was being terrified by a wave of inexplicable vanishings: men, women, even children. In the very edition of *The Times* which carried the report of the St. Luke's trial at the Central Criminal Court, there were advertisements by private detectives, offering rewards for information concerning two missing girls, Elizabeth Carter and Mary Seward. Young and old—and not all women—had been caught up in this wave of disappearances. Some of the missing were later found dead; but very few. Stanger was one of those who had vanished without a trace, and the police, desperately anxious to get at the pattern, the motive, behind these horrifying abductions, treated the Stanger disappearance as "top priority" right from the beginning. They were extremely angry that Geisel had not called them in earlier.

The local police were bypassed. Scotland Yard put the investigation

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into the hands of one of its senior Inspectors, as was later reported by *The Times*: "Henry Radky (*sic*; but the correct spelling was Radike), inspector of police, said that in April (i.e., 1882) he received instructions to make inquiries. On April 28th, he saw the prisoner, and took a statement."

Inspector Henry Radike, A Division (Whitehall—Scotland Yard), went to Kreuznach, Hesse-Cassel, the following month, failed to find any trace of the missing Stanger, and returned to England, to arrest Stumm on September 12, 1882, "upon a charge of forging an order for the payment of £78." (Actually, the sum mentioned in the indictment was £76 15s.—whose significance I shall point out later.)

This "order" is officialese for "check." As *The Times* wryly pointed out, all the other checks that Stumm was known or assumed to have signed with Stanger's name had been "lost." Only this single check had, unluckily for him, survived to serve as evidence against Stumm. Still, this solitary document was sufficient to get Stumm ten years' penal servitude, despite a brilliant defense by Montague Williams, Queen's Counsel, ably assisted by his "junior," Mr. Fillan, whom Stumm rewarded by a stream of abuse from the prisoner's dock.

That Stumm was guilty of forgery seems obvious. And that he had a hand in Stanger's vanishing seems as obvious to me as it did to the average Briton of 1882. If Stanger was really decamping to dodge his debts, as Mrs. Stanger claimed that he told her, why did he leave £400 in the bank to finance the guilty "honeymoon" of his wife and her lover, Stumm?

But it is not Stumm's petty dishonesty which concerns us here: it is the interest this case had for young Dr. Conan Doyle, now shakily setting up his practice in the town of Southsea, on the south coast of England. It is true that Doyle was deeply interested—as was all Britain at the time—in the question: What happened to Urban Napoleon Stanger? But what interested young Dr. Conan Doyle even more was the question: What would have happened in the case had George Geisel chosen *a professionally competent detective,* and not the well-meaning but ineffectual Wendel Scherer?

For Wendel Scherer's incompetence was now a matter of public record. The Magistrate at Worship Street Police Court, Henry Jeffreys Busby, had seen to that. It was at Worship Street that the preliminary evidence had been taken, and Stumm, committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, had been taken into the custody of the

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Court. But it was not because of the Magistrate's scathing remarks on the detective's incompetence that Wendel Scherer found himself, for a short while, the most famous detective in Britain.

Giving evidence, Scherer drew all Britain's attention to himself at this preliminary inquiry by refusing to name the person who had commissioned him to advertise for Stanger—even though it was that person who had finally gone to the police!

Calmly, firmly, almost arrogantly, Wendel Scherer declined to be either ordered or threatened, for all that Mr. Jeffreys Busby sneered and angrily denounced the upstart claimant to "professional status."

MR. BUSBY: You are an inquiry agent?

WITNESS: Not an inquiry agent. A detective.

MR. BUSBY: It is the same thing. "New presbyter is but old priest writ large," I suggest. Eh, sir?

WITNESS: With respect, sir, not so.

MR. BUSBY: A detective? Then you are a member of the Detective Police? They are the only detectives known to me. Mr. Radike, of Whitehall, is one. Are you under that gentleman's jurisdiction?

WITNESS: I am under the jurisdiction only of the Common Law. I am not a member of the Detective Police Force. I am a private detective—a private consulting detective. *(Witness stressed the word "consulting.")*

MR. BUSBY: People "consult" you, Mr. Scherer? In an office? In chambers, like some professional gentleman?

WITNESS: In an office. I am a professional gentleman; I am a professional consulting detective. This is why I must respectfully preserve the anonymity of my client. It would be a grave breach of professional etiquette were I to reveal his name.

MR. BUSBY: Hoity-toity, sir, you try my patience a little too far! I should commit you for contempt! An inquiry agent, of which half a dozen advertise their services every day in the newspapers—and we have these preposterous claims of yours to professional dignity, professional secrecy, and I don't know what else! Stand down, sir; but do not leave the Court—I shall wish to speak with you later!

But Geisel, now alarmed at what might happen to Scherer—and perhaps to himself—saved Scherer from further questioning by volunteering the information that it had been he, George Geisel, who had hired the German private consulting detective. ("Why could we not have had this information at the beginning?" the Magistrate grumbled.)

Yet, whatever Mr. Jeffreys Busby's snobbish opinion of inquiry

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agents who called themselves "professional gentlemen," there was one avid reader of the newspapers who disagreed with the Magistrate and felt a warm sympathy with the detective. This was Dr. Conan Doyle, to whom Mr. Busby would never have denied the professional status he had denied to Wendel Scherer, private detective.

In his instinctive ranging on the side of Wendel Scherer, Conan Doyle was displaying that sympathy which, throughout his life, he was to show toward the poor, the downtrodden, the bullied, the neglected, the despised. In later years, Dr. (afterward Sir) Arthur Conan Doyle was to feel that same instinctive sympathy with men whom he considered wrongly condemned: Beck, Slater, Edalji; now, in 1882, he felt equally moved to side with Wendel Scherer, a man who, doing no harm to others, had simply tried to "better himself" in the rigidly caste-organized society of Queen Victoria.

And then—what Kierkegaard calls "the qualitative jump"—came the imaginative author's brain asking itself the vital question: "But suppose that a man *justifiably* called himself a private consulting detective?—a man with as tender a regard for his professional status as ever Mr. Wendel Scherer claimed, but with professional *efficiency,* professional *integrity,* true, unchallenged professional *standing,* to back up his self-esteem?"

Follow Conan Doyle's excited thinking along these lines; imagine his wondering what would happen if a *real* private consulting detective had been pitted, in a mystery such as St. Luke's, against the professionals of Scotland Yard. If a London police-court Magistrate should dare to question the standing of such a man, with what lordly pride would the *real* detective reject the sneers of the Magistrate; with what assurance would the *real* detective insist on the standing of his profession! The young doctor had already begun to write short stories, in an endeavor to eke out the slender earnings of his medical practice (£154—then $770—in the first year). His mind was full of stories, long and short.

Now his fertile Irish imagination began to busy itself with a mystery in which a private consulting detective should succeed where Scotland Yard had failed. This man would be a self-proclaimed private consulting detective, successful where Wendel Scherer had proved unsuccessful. Yet there would be much of Scherer in him—not the least, Scherer's courage in the face of the Magistrate's bullying, Scherer's pride in the face of overt sneers, Scherer's self-sacrificing loyalty to his client (in the very finest tradition, Dr. Conan Doyle noted with admiration, of the finest professions—his own included!).

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A Study in Scarlet

Ormond Sacker – ~~from Scarsdale~~ from Afghanistan
Lived at 221 B Upper Baker Street
with
I Sherrinford Holmes –
The Laws of Evidence
Received –
Sleepy eyed young man – philosopher – Collector of rare Violins
An Amati – Chemical laboratory
I have four hundred a year –
I am a Consulting detective –
What rot this is" I cried – throwing the volume
: petulantly aside " I must say that I have no
patience with people who build up fine theories in their
own armchairs which can never be reduced to
practice –
Lecoq was a bungler –
Dupin was better. Dupin was decidedly smart –
His trick of following a train of thought was more
sensational than clever but still he had analytical genius.

PAGE FROM A. CONAN DOYLE'S NOTEBOOK: THE ORIGINAL IS THE PROPERTY OF THE LATE ADRIAN CONAN DOYLE.

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The fictional detective who was emerging into vigorous, highly individual life in Conan Doyle's brain was intended, by his creator, to be all the fine things that real-life Wendel Scherer was—as well as many things that Scherer was not. The fictional detective was to be self-assured, arrogant, insolent when necessary, almost superhumanly intelligent, able to see a clue where Scotland Yard failed to see one; tender-hearted to the weak; active, ageless, learned, but contemptuous of the "useless" academic knowledge that the ordinary man despises; a master of "manly" exercises such as boxing, but no waster of his time in effete aristocratic "sports"—he was never to shoot grouse with Lord So-and-so or ride to hounds with a fashionable Hunt.

While the Stanger-Stumm-Scherer case was still fresh in his memory, Dr. Conan Doyle, in one of those long waits between patients, smoothed out a leaf in his notebook and began to make some notes. What he wrote is shown, in holograph, on the facing page. And mark these skimpy notes well—they are the first blueprint of the world's most famous fictional detective.

But before I go on to trace the fictional Sherlock in the real-life Scherer, let me first trace the origins of *A Study in Scarlet* in The St. Luke's Mystery.

3. *Dr. Conan Doyle Agrees to Differ*

A Study in Scarlet is not a fictionalized account of The St. Luke's Mystery. We can understand the essential differences between real-life and fictional mysteries if we bear two points in mind:

1. So long as Urban Napoleon Stanger was missing, the murder charge against Stumm was not dismissed, but "reserved." The case, therefore, was *sub judice,* and any fictional "solution" would have brought the author into conflict with the law. Important newspapers could risk a discussion of the case; an impecunious young provincial doctor dared not take such a risk.

2. The whole purpose of *A Study in Scarlet* was to give Conan Doyle the opportunity of presenting *his* version of the Ideal Private Consulting Detective. To do that, the fictional sleuth had to be given opportunities of *reasoning and action* denied to the real-life Wendel Scherer. Even had a fictionalized account of The St. Luke's Mystery been permitted to Conan Doyle, it would not have served as a vehicle for his presentation of the new-type detective. Note that the "blueprint" has not a word of what "Sherrinford Holmes" *does*—it is completely concerned with what he *is*.

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However, Doyle did not wish the reader to forget that his story owed its inspiration to The St. Luke's Mystery, so, as I shall now prove, the real-life case is echoed again and again in Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*:

The St. Luke's Mystery	*A Study in Scarlet*
Urban Napoleon STANGER: missing — perhaps on the run.	Joseph STANGERSON: missing—certainly on the run.
Issue of *The Times* reporting Stumm's conviction heads its front-page column of shipping advertisements with a bold ad for the GUION LINE.	Two tickets "from GUION Steamship Company" found on dead Enoch Drebber.
Stumm charged with forgery of check for £76 15s.	Found on dead Drebber: "Pocket edition of Boccaccio's *Decameron,* with name of Joseph Stangerson upon the flyleaf," and "loose money to the extent of seven pounds thirteen." Is it by chance that Conan Doyle selects a book with the element "ten" (Greek, *deka* = ten) in the title, and makes the dead Drebber's pocket yield a sum *exactly one-tenth* of that mentioned in Stumm's indictment?
When Geisel inquires of Stumm after the missing Stanger, Stumm says that Stanger has gone to the country, "having burst a blood vessel."	When Drebber's body is found in the empty house in Lauriston Gardens it is covered with blood. This is the result of Jefferson Hope's *having burst a blood vessel.* As he explained later: "I believe I would have had a fit of some sort if the blood had not gushed from my nose and relieved me."

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Stanger, the man who disappeared.

Doyle gives Drebber the Christian name of the Prophet Enoch, memorable for having disappeared.

Date of Stanger's vanishing: 1881.

Holmes and Watson go to empty house to view Drebber's body: 1881.

The Times, December 12, 1882: Serious illness of Lord STAMFORD — "The Earl of Stamford and Warrington remains in a critical condition."

Dr. John Watson introduced to Sherlock Holmes by "young STAMFORD, who had been a dresser under me at Barts."

Barts (St. Bartholomew's Hospital) is the local big hospital for the St. Luke's district.

Conan Doyle makes Watson meet Holmes at Barts, very much in the heart of The St. Luke's Mystery district.

Stanger's bakery in Lever Street very near the famous Eagle Tavern. ("Up and down the City Road, in and out the Eagle; that's the way the money goes: Pop goes the weasel!" — old song).

Eagle Tavern's name suggested slight alteration of German to American emphasis in Conan Doyle's story.

General Booth, Founder of the Salvation Army, bought Eagle Tavern, but was ejected for having failed to comply with terms of the lease: a much-publicized story that got notably good coverage in *The Times.*

Riots all over England, notably in Brighton, Worthing, and Gravesend, over the Salvation Army. Scare newspaper reports of Mormons' alleged enticement and/or abduction of servant girls must have suggested to Conan Doyle the Salvation Army/Latter Day Saints transposition.

Salvation Army members attacked in the St. Luke's district by organized gangs of loafers and street arabs who called them-

"It is the Baker Street Division of the detective police force," said my companion gravely; and as he spoke, there rushed into the

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selves, in ridicule of "General" Booth, The Skeleton Army.	room half a dozen of the dirtiest and most ragged little street Arabs that ever I clapped eyes on. "'Tention!" cried Holmes, in a sharp tone, and the six dirty little scoundrels stood in a line. — *A Study in Scarlet* (I shall have more to say about "the Baker Street Irregulars" later.)
Eagle Tavern, near Stanger's shop.	"Eagle Canon" occurs in the Mormon section of *A Study in Scarlet.*
Strong German element in The St. Luke's Mystery: "Almost every one whose name occurs in the proceedings seems to be *either a German baker or a German miller.*" (*The Times,* December 12, 1882)	Strong German element retained in *A Study in Scarlet,* despite the superficial "Americanization." Conan Doyle was so conscious of the strong German element of the real-life St. Luke's Mystery that he makes *The Daily Telegraph* remark upon the "German name of the victim." Also Hope, after his nose has bled over the dead Drebber, dips his finger in the blood and writes the German word *Rache* (revenge) on the wall of the empty room.
George Geisel, *baker,* lived at 23 *Baker's* Row, Whitechapel.	Holmes and Watson took chambers in Baker Street (but "Baker Street" will be treated later in a separate section).

So much for the principal points of "echo" between the real-life St. Luke's Mystery and *A Study in Scarlet.* Let me go on now to examine two other matters of interest: the emergence of Baker Street as the Holmes-Watson residence, and the origins of Sherlock Holmes in the private consulting detective, Wendel Scherer.

4. *Why Baker Street?*

Baker Street—by which we mean that Baker Street running between

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the Marylebone Road and Portman Square—enjoys an almost equal fame with that of the famous sleuth who shared rooms there with Dr. Watson from 1881 onward. If, in England, we name our Sherlockian fan club after the Master (The Sherlock Holmes Society), the "mother lodge" of Sherlockianism in America is partly named after the street (The Baker Street Irregulars). Why, in choosing a residence for Sherlock Holmes, did Conan Doyle pick on Baker Street?

Well, if you go back to the page of notes for *A Study in Scarlet,* you will see that Conan Doyle places "Sherrinford (not yet Sherlock) Holmes" at 221 B Upper Baker Street. 221 B, as a possible number, was quite imaginary in 1881, when there were only 84 separate numbers in Baker Street (much shorter then than it is now). But why the word Upper?—as well as why the name Baker Street?

If you look at the map of east-central London and concentrate on the St. Luke's district, you will find that an important thoroughfare of that district is Upper Street; and I would like the reader to bear that fact in mind while I demonstrate how the "Baker" element is so strong in the Stanger-Stumm case that the name would have forced itself inescapably on someone as susceptible to suggestion as young Dr. Conan Doyle.

What becomes obvious was that Conan Doyle, fascinated by The St. Luke's Mystery and the chance to write a new kind of detective story, not only read all the newspaper reports, but also looked up all the reference books to which I, nearly ninety years later, necessarily went. It was what Conan Doyle found in those reference books that colored both his imagery and his choice of names when he set about the task of "converting" the real-life St. Luke's Mystery into the fictional *A Study in Scarlet.*

Let us examine the sources from which the "Baker" element in Conan Doyle's material came:

1. *The BAKER ELEMENT in the actual proceedings*

The missing man:	Urban Napoleon Stanger, BAKER.
The anxious friend:	George Geisel, BAKER. 23 BAKER'S Row, Whitechapel.
The accused:	Franz Felix Stumm, BAKER.

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The jailer:	At Worship Street Police Court, where the charges against Stumm were summarily heard, the accused was taken into custody by the jailer, Thomas BAKER!

2. *The BAKER ELEMENT from other sources*

The witnesses:	As *The Times* querulously remarked (December 12, 1882), all were either German BAKERS or German millers.
The friend:	Mr. Boulnois, friend of young Dr. Conan Doyle and member of the Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society, was a son of one of the partners who owned the prosperous BAKER STREET BAZAAR where the most famous tenant was Madame Tussaud's Waxworks Exhibition.

There is one other curious point which ought to be mentioned here. In turning up Baker's Row in The Post Office London Directory for 1881 or 1882, Conan Doyle may well have made the same mistake that I did: I found myself looking at a list of the residents of Baker's Row, *Clerkenwell,* and not those of Baker's Row, *Whitechapel* (that I was hunting through to check George Geisel's address). However, this "wrong" Baker's Row gave me a bit of a shock, for the resident of Number 1A was listed as—Richard HOLMES!

The point to notice is that all the names that Conan Doyle first encountered in reading The St. Luke's Mystery kept cropping up as he checked facts in the various reference books—and, as I shall now demonstrate, the name Holmes, as well as the name Sherlock, were as obviously "forced" on Conan Doyle as was the name Baker.

5. *The Origin of "Sherlock Holmes"*

We shall never begin to appreciate the full character of Sherlock Holmes if we do not constantly remember the real-life person in whom Sherlock Holmes originated. For if Sherlock Holmes is not

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exactly Wendel Scherer, Holmes is Scherer as he might have been, Scherer as he ought to have been. Sherlock Holmes is Wendel Scherer idealized, and we have Conan Doyle's own letters and notes to prove that he was, at this time, deeply concerned with an idealized detective.

"I have read Gaboriau's *Lecoq the Detective,*" he wrote; *"The Gilded Clique* . . . and *The Lerouge Case.* All very good. Wilkie Collins, but more so." There are other references in his papers to Gaboriau's books, which had just begun to be published—in the early 1880's—by the London firm of Vizetelly. And when Conan Doyle at last sits down to sketch out the plot of *A Study in Scarlet,* we see that he is still thinking of Lecoq, as well as of Dupin, though Edgar Allan Poe's detective is far more superhuman than Gaboriau's Lecoq. Perhaps this desire to create a superhuman Scherer is the reason for the different opinion that Conan Doyle expresses of Lecoq when he comes to make the notes for *A Study in Scarlet.* The stories about Lecoq are no longer "very good," and "Wilkie Collins, but more so." Instead, on the notebook page already shown, Conan Doyle makes Sherrinford Holmes say: "Lecoq was a bungler—Dupin was better." The omniscient, arrogant Sherlock Holmes is emerging from the less well-equipped chrysalis of the real-life Wendel Scherer.

Now, if one looks at almost any stall outside almost any British bookseller's shop, one is likely to find a copy of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table,* or one of the other works of that great American writer, Oliver Wendell Holmes. For decades Wendell Holmes was a best-seller in Britain, and we have it on record that Conan Doyle, like so many thousands of his fellow Britons, was an ardent admirer of the American writer. So the unusual name "Wendel" must irresistibly have reminded Conan Doyle of "Holmes."

But Holmes, as a name, was already familiar to Conan Doyle—and in a way which links it to the name Stamford ("young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Barts").

On the left-hand side of The Royal Infirmary for Children & Women, Waterloo Road, there was the shop of Mr. Thomas HOLMES, and on the right of the hospital was STAMFORD Street. But turn your back to the hospital and there, on the opposite side of Waterloo Road, by the left-hand side of the railway station, is HOLMES Row.

One can now see where that experimental and fortunately discarded Sherrinford Holmes originated, for it is clear that Conan Doyle

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had the Waterloo Road district in mind when he was experimenting with *A Study in Scarlet*. Dr. Watson was to have been called "Ormond Sacker," and London's other great children's hospital is in Great ORMOND Street, while at the back of St. John's Church, turning off STAMFORD Street, is SACKER Street: thus, "Ormond Sacker."

I suggest, then, that in seeking a fictional name for Scherer which would disguise but recall the original, Conan Doyle had the following names running in his head:

1. Wendel SCHERER
2. STAMFORD Street
3. Earl of STAMFORD and WARRINGTON (*The Times,* December 12, 1882)
4. STANFORD and WINNINGTON — THE BURNING OF STANFORD COURT: "The fire at Stanford Court, the seat of Sir Francis Winnington, was not extinguished until Wednesday afternoon." (*The Times,* December 12, 1882)

The near-likeness of two pairs of names in adjoining paragraphs is always an attention catcher. It is easy to understand how these names came to be registered on the memory of Conan Doyle.

So, as a trial essay in name changing, we have "Sherrinford," compounded of Sher-in-ford, derived from SCHERER/WARRINGTON and WINNINGTON/STAMFORD and STANFORD.

And so, perhaps, the name might have remained—had not Conan Doyle, that inveterate checker of facts, done what I did nearly ninety years later: looked up the senior officers of the Metropolitan Police, as they were listed in The Post Office London Directory for 1881. Perhaps Conan Doyle was merely concerned to check the correct spelling of the name that *The Times* gave as Radky. But whatever Conan Doyle's reason, this is what he found:

A Division, Whitehall (Scotland Yard): (For inspection of common lodginghouses) Inspector Thomas HOLMES
B Division, Rochester Row: Chief-Inspector James SHERLOCK
H Division, Whitechapel: Inspector John LE COCQ (*sic*)
L Division, Lambeth: Chief-Inspector William SHERLOCK
D Division, St. Marylebone: Inspector James STANFORD, of Public Carriages

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Now Conan Doyle, having been to school in Feldkirch, in Eastern Austria, spoke German well, and the translation of the German word, "Scherer," into "barber" must have been instinctive the first time that he saw the name Wendel Scherer in print. But there is also, besides that word's near-equivalent in English, *shearer,* a slang word which belongs as much to the nursery and the children's playground as to the Army: "Shearlocks."

Only the other day, on my way to mail some letters, I saw some children playing in the street, and heard them singing the words of an old song:

Shearlocks the barber went to shave his father . .

Whether Conan Doyle had decided to put the scene of Drebber's death in the Brixton Road (Lauriston Gardens) before or after he had seen the Metropolitan Police list, we do not know, but it must be noted that the Brixton Road is situated within L Division, and, in 1881, L Division was under the authority of Chief-Inspector William SHERLOCK.

So the name was unavoidable. Sherlock it had to be. The name not only recalled Scherer, it was a translation of Scherer. Out went Sherrinford, its place taken by Sherlock.

Conan Doyle must, as they say, have "tried it for size." He spoke it aloud. He wrote it down. It *sounded* right. It *looked* right. So—for the ages—Sherlock Holmes it became. Wendel Scherer, idealized, was to live forever as Sherlock Holmes.

6. *And What of Dr. Watson's Name?*

We have learned that a Dr. James Watson was a leading member of the Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society when Conan Doyle was practicing medicine locally. It has been suggested that Conan Doyle changed the doctor's first name to John (adding the middle initial H.) but there may have been a nearer inspiration, not only for Watson but for the fuller form of John Watson.

You may recall that on coming down from the University, Holmes took rooms, he said, in Montague Street, by the British Museum. Now, in 1878 and later, Number 24 Montague Street was a lodginghouse owned or rented by *a Mrs. Holmes.* Her name plate must have inspired Conan Doyle to place Holmes's first lodgings in this street. Well, if one left Montague Street in those years, crossed Great Russell Street into Bloomsbury Square and walked through it to Southampton Street, one could not have failed to see, on

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the front door of Number 6, a gleaming brass plate that read: JOHN WATSON, M.D.

7. *The Origin of the Baker Street Irregulars*

The band of street arabs in Holmes's employ—the Baker Street Irregulars—provides one of the happiest touches in *A Study in Scarlet*. I have already mentioned that the idea of a gang parodying military discipline may have been inspired by the gangs of The Skeleton Army which were raising hell all over Britain for the "soldiers" of the Salvation Army: whatever Victorian Britain was—and it may well have been more than half atheistic—it certainly didn't like unorthodox religious organizations.

But what may be the much more remote origin of the Baker Street Irregulars I found in the most unexpected place of all: in a passing comment in the pages of Sir William Smith's *A Smaller Latin-English Dictionary,* which first appeared when Conan Doyle was eleven. If one looks up the word *paniceus,* this is what one finds:

> **paniceus,** a, um, *adj.* (panis) *made of bread*: milites panicei, apparently a pun, as one might say, *the Baker-street brigade.*

Had this innocent little Latin pun remained in Conan Doyle's head all through the years of boyhood, youth, and early manhood, emerging happily at last to create one of the most memorable collective nouns in literature: the Baker Street Irregulars?

8. *And What of Dr. Joseph Bell?*

Dr. Joseph Bell, professor at the Edinburgh Medical School when Conan Doyle was a student there, is "officially" stated to be "the original of Sherlock Holmes." Indeed, we have this on no less an authority than the creator of Sherlock Holmes himself, as well as of the publishers of *A Study in Scarlet* (Ward, Lock). Conan Doyle, in an article in *The Strand Magazine,* described Dr. Bell's method of snap diagnosis, based on highly trained powers of observation. The article ends with these unambiguous words:

> "... when I took my degree and went to Africa, the remarkable individuality and discriminating tact of my old master made a deep and lasting impression on me, though I had not the faintest idea that it would one day lead me to forsake medicine for story-writing."

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This handsome and unequivocal tribute is reinforced in an article by Dr. Bell, more or less confirming Conan Doyle's tribute, which appeared in the pages of *The Bookman,* and was reprinted as a preface to the fourth reissue of the third edition of *A Study in Scarlet* (1893), though it must be observed that Dr. Bell modestly claims for his predecessor, Syme, not only a superior skill in medical diagnosis, but also a direct influence on Conan Doyle, through having made the Syme method "a tradition of the school."

Now what are we to make of all this? Was Wendel Scherer the original of Sherlock Holmes, or was it, as Conan Doyle has stated, Dr. Joseph Bell?

The answer would seem to be—both. We must not forget that, even in 1892, when the fourth reissue of the third edition was being arranged, the Stanger-Stumm case was still *sub judice.* But, much more important, The St. Luke's Mystery, already ten years in the past, was totally forgotten. There would have been no point in explaining to the readers of *The Strand Magazine* that Conan Doyle had been inspired to create the most popular detective in fiction by an obscure, unsuccessful real-life detective whom the youthful Conan Doyle had admired a decade before.

What would Wendel Scherer have meant to the readers of *The Strand?* Whereas Dr. Joseph Bell was living, respected, and certainly not unsuccessful. And Dr. Bell's medical detective powers were certainly impressive.

The snap deductions which so astonish Watson, and are intended to astonish the reader, are clearly based on Dr. Bell's similar tricks:

> "Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Stamford, introducing us.
>
> "How are you?" he said cordially . . . "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive."
>
> "How on earth did you know that?" I asked in astonishment.
>
> "Never mind," said he, chuckling to himself.

In this one respect—a most important respect, of course—Holmes owes something of his origin to Dr. Joseph Bell; in every other respect, including the more important points of name, arrogance, pride, aggressiveness, and relative youth, he originates in the proud, principled—even if unsuccessful—private consulting detective, Mr. Wendel Scherer, of 28 Chepstow Place, Westbourne Grove.

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AREN'T ALL COPS DUMB?

by HERMINE HOFFMAN

RAOUL SAT IN HIS USUAL place at the little corner table in the bar, half hidden by a dusty potted palm. One hand was turning the glass of diluted whiskey, while under cover of the table the other hand nervously caressed his pocket where the knife was hidden.

It was early, and there were only a few scattered customers in the little night club. Later it would be crowded and noisy, as it always was on Saturday night. In the dull blue light it would be difficult to distinguish one customer from another. The old air conditioner was noisily and futilely trying to dispel the smoke, while the trio of bored musicians was half-heartedly playing *Hello, Dolly!*

Raoul had come to the club early tonight. In the old days, he was thinking, Elena would have accompanied him. Before she began to go with Julio she would sit with Raoul at their corner table and make jokes about the customers, giggling and teasing him in the way she knew he enjoyed. He could see her now, her full bosom half exposed, leaning over the table to look up at him. When she wore the costume she loved so much, the slender tube of shiny white satin with rows of long, swinging fringe, her body was never still.

The best part of their dance routine was her solo in the center of the stage. With her hips swiveling, her arms and long black hair flying, she would sometimes cry out at the sheer joy of dancing. The men in the audience went wild. They clapped and stamped for her.

Then Raoul would reach for her and begin their finale of fast whirling circles around the dance floor. As the music swelled, Raoul would feel his body almost burst with the thrill of holding that quicksilver figure so close to him. In the early days of their partnership she would respond and press even closer to him, knowing well the state of excitement she had induced in him. But, since Julio had come, it was all routine and the smile was only for the paying guests, no longer for Raoul.

Why had he brought Julio here? He asked himself again what a girl like Elena could possibly see in dull, drab Julio who never

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 327th issue of EQMM, and in it we offer you the 350th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine—an average of more than one "first story" per issue since Volume 1, Number 1 appeared in the Fall of 1941. And the 350th "first story" is typical of the work that brand-new writers, never previously published, have consistently brought to these pages— fine, honest, interesting stories of crime and detection, of mystery and suspense, by dedicated, talented, extremely promising new writers. We are proud of our "first story" record—350 in 30 years—an achievement that gives us more pleasure, and is certainly more important for the future of the genre, than even EQMM's publication of stories by 11 Nobel Prize winners and more than two dozen Pulitzer Prize winners . . .

The author of the 350th "first story," Hermine Hoffman, lives in Fort Lauderdale. Before moving to Florida, she and her husband were members of an MWA (Mystery Writers of America) writing class. "It was there," Mrs. Hoffman told us, "that I developed an interest in writing mystery stories." During her college years at Syracuse University, and in the following years as a mother and housewife, she had written many stories, but had not considered any of them good enough to submit for publication.

Her "part-time occupation" now is book reviewing, and "when not reading voraciously," she is "doing needlepoint, or, like Nero Wolfe, taking care of many orchid plants."

spoke unless he had to, who just sat quietly and sadly watching the world and understanding no more than half of what he saw and heard.

Every night when they walked out the back door of the club, there was Julio leaning against the wall, waiting for her. He would never come inside. He was too shy. And every night Elena would change, like Cinderella in reverse, into a proper sedate girl, her long black hair in a ponytail, her swinging hips stilled.

Raoul wondered what they did in the hours they spent together. He asked Elena once and she

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laughed as she answered, "Talk."

"Talk!" he scoffed. "Julio never opens his mouth except to eat."

"You don't know him," she said. "He is quiet because he is lonely here. He's good and sweet, and with me he is not afraid to speak. He talks all the time of when we will go home to Cuba. You are his cousin. You know he was only happy when he was working the land. He is a gentle one; he does not want to beat the world, like you!"

"But, Elena, what would you do in the old country? You'd be chasing *ninos* all day, washing diapers, cooking *'pollo*—"

"And how do you know that isn't what I want to do?"

Raoul laughed contemptuously.

"You think all I want is men to look at me, hey?" she snapped. "You think because I shake good I like all those dirty men to put their hands on me? Well, I tell you something. There is no one who ever treated me like Julio does. He respects me, and this is good. Sure, I like my fun! But that isn't all I want. You wouldn't understand," she finished with disdain. "You'd rather dance your feet off at night just to get a little money to put on the horses! Why, do you know that Julio's got almost three hundred dollars saved up to buy a farm back in Cuba?"

"He is a fool. And you are a fool, too, to think you will get back to Cuba. You will never go back. And he will always be an orange-juice squeezer."

"Don't be so sure," Elena called over her shoulder as she walked away.

The Havana Club, where Raoul and Elena performed, was situated on Southwest 26th Street in Miami. It was a street of run-down motels, small dirty restaurants, night clubs, a laundromat, a TV repair shop, and a store that sold bait and fishing tackle. There were many streets like it in Miami on the way from the airport to Miami Beach.

Next door to the Havana Club, across a sparsely landscaped courtyard, was the Happiness Motel. No less appropriate name could have been chosen. Its dreary little rooms, furnished with a minimum of second-hand furniture, could not possibly offer any happiness to its occupants. The *Vacancy* sign was always lit. In return for some steady income the owner-manager was willing to let Raoul, Elena, and Julio have their rooms on a cheap weekly basis.

Raoul hated these surroundings and was determined to escape from them. Often, in the days before Julio's arrival, he would take Elena over to the Beach. He would change into his best clothes—the suit with the narrow tight trousers and the pointed high-cut black shoes.

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They would go to one of the big famous clubs where, very late at night, the dancing teachers from the Collins Avenue hotels, the other dance teams, and the gigolos who were free for the night would gather. They all danced and talked shop until early morning. Someone was always promising to get them a contract for a job at a Beach spot, where the big money was. Elena laughed at Raoul for believing them.

"Sure," she would say, "you buy them a drink and they'll promise you anything!"

Now it was always Julio who was waiting for her at the back door. At first Elena asked Raoul to join them.

"Who can you see at a pizza joint?" he answered.

Once in a while Elena would yield to Raoul's pleadings and "for business reasons" go to the Beach with him. Julio was displeased, but he let her go. On one of those occasions, just last week, Raoul had got drunk, and his dancing had become more and more abandoned. At first Elena had laughed, but as his hands moved over her back more and more insistently and as he pressed her closer to him she became angry and demanded that he take her home.

When she got back to the motel she ran into her room and locked the door, something none of them had ever done before. Raoul pounded on the flimsy wood, making enough noise to wake Julio in the next room. Dazed, he came out to see what was going on.

"*Que pasa?*" he asked sleepily.

At the sound of his voice Elena had opened her door and said, "It's okay, Julio. He's just drunk."

Julio turned and stared at Raoul. There was a strange look on Julio's normally placid face.

"She must not go with you again," he stated.

Raoul stumbled into his room without answering.

The next night, after the last show, Elena spoke to Raoul.

"Tonight you come out with us for some coffee, please?"

"Why tonight?"

"Please, Raoul, just tonight. We want to talk to you."

"Talk here," he demanded.

"We have too much to say. Come with us to the restaurant. It will be quiet there now."

"Why must Julio come? You go with me to the Beach, and you can talk to me."

"No, Raoul. What we have to say, Julio must tell you, too."

"Julio, Julio!" he shouted. "That's all I ever hear from you!"

His voice dropped suddenly. Desperately now he begged, "Elena, come out with me tonight. Forget Julio. With him you are nothing. With me, you will see, we will be the best team in Miami, and soon—"

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"Stop," she said gently. "It's no use, Raoul. What we wanted to tell you is that Julio and me, we are going to get married."

Raoul was shocked. He must have known it was coming, and yet he couldn't believe that Elena, his pretty, gay, worldly partner, would settle for someone as dumb as his cousin, Julio.

When the three of them were seated in a dark booth at the Pizza Parlor, Julio began speaking.

"Raoul, cousin," he said, "you have been good to me and I am grateful. I do not forget this. When things are better in Cuba and we can go home, I will repay you. Now I hope you will be happy for us. I do not wish to hurt you, but you must understand why Elena cannot dance with you when we are married."

"Cannot dance?" Raoul cried. "Why not?"

With dignity Julio answered, "It is not right for a man's wife to shake her body for other men. You have seen what happens. Like last night. My wife will dance only for me."

Elena's eyes were shining with pride as she listened to Julio. Fool, Raoul thought. "But what will she do?" he shouted. "All she knows is to dance and she must work—you can't support her."

"I have arranged for her to work at the juice stand, with me," Julio said.

Raoul was furious now. "What am I supposed to do without a partner?"

"You will find another one," Elena answered. "You know all those girls on the Beach."

"You're damn right I'll find another," Raoul cried, "and this one won't be stupid enough to fall for a jerk like Julio." He stalked out of the restaurant. He saw Elena jump up as if to follow him, but Julio held her back and she sat down again . . .

Tonight, sitting at his usual table in the bar, Raoul went over it all again in his mind. No, there was only one way out. He knew she was the reason the club had hired him, and he also knew there were a hundred other dancers like himself looking for jobs in Miami. He needed Elena, he could not get work without her as his partner; but she was completely dominated by Julio, and Raoul knew that he could not change her mind.

He picked up his drink, sipped it slowly, and again went over his plan.

Julio usually slept from the time Elena left him until she was finished with the act at the club. After Raoul and she had finished their dance routine, the comedian came on and performed for the next twenty minutes. That meant Raoul would have ample time to get back to the club before the house lights were put on again.

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No one would notice that he had gone out. If anyone was interested, they would take for granted that he had been sitting at his usual table in the bar, near the dressing-room entrance.

It was almost time for the floor show to begin. Raoul slipped through the entrance to his small dressing room. Quickly he put on the ruffled blue shirt and the narrow black trousers. He wrapped the black sash tightly around his narrow waist. Last of all he put on the soft patent-leather dancing pumps, always so carefully rubbed each night with vaseline, to preserve them. Then he checked the pocket of his raincoat where he had slipped the knife and the pair of gloves. He left the coat hanging over the chair.

Elena was waiting for him at the bandstand platform. They waited as a waiter sprinkled the floor with the wax that Raoul insisted on for each performance. Then they took their seats.

The houselights were lowered, the "spot" was lit, and the master of ceremonies came forward to go into his patter. He joked for a few minutes and then announced, "And now the greatest dance team ever to come out of Cuba. The hottest dancers in town. I mean the Cuban whirlwinds, Raoul and Elena!"

They opened with a variation of the twist, swinging into a rhumba, followed by a cha-cha, and then the finale, their big number, with Elena's solo.

The audience tonight was particularly loud and enthusiastic and they insisted on an encore. Raoul was anxious for the act to be over. Finally they were allowed to go off. Elena went to sit at the bar. She was always thirsty after their act and Alex had a tall cold glass of ginger ale waiting for her. It used to be beer, but Julio disapproved of women drinking, so now it was ginger ale.

Raoul went directly to his dressing room. For a moment or two he stood still. He was fully aware that what he was about to do would change the course of three lives. There was still time to change his mind before it was too late.

Deliberately he rehearsed his wrongs, fanning the flames of his resentment against a man who lived like a saint, and yet would steal his cousin's girl, his cousin's partner, the very bread out of his own cousin's mouth! Saint or no saint, Julio would have to die. It was the only way to get rid of him and leave Raoul free to soar to professional heights with Elena.

He was sure that nobody saw him as he slipped out of his dressing room wearing the raincoat over his dancing clothes. He knew everyone would be watching the show, listening to the new

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comedian who had just come on. Noiselessly, with the agility of a dancer, he crossed the patio to the motel.

The door to Julio's room was unlocked, as he knew it would be. His cousin was such a trusting soul! Except for the light from the motel's neon sign, the room was in darkness. Raoul approached the bed softly, and stood for a few moments looking down at the inert figure in a rumpled shirt. He had a vision of Elena sharing a bed in the future with this sleeping clod and it was this vision, brief as it was, that gave him the strength he needed to flash the knife and drive it into Julio's heart.

Time was now growing short. The next step, as he had planned, was to open the top bureau drawer and scatter the contents to make it look as if a sneak thief had been searching for money. Raoul never for a moment believed the story Elena had told him—about Julio saving up nearly three hundred dollars toward buying a farm in Cuba. How could an orange jerker save up so much money? And who was ever going back to Cuba?

Better stop thinking, he told himself, and get on with it. He found a wallet under some handkerchiefs. It contained four worn dollar bills. He pocketed them and threw the wallet on the floor. He almost smiled as he thought how disappointed a real thief would have been if this was all he got for his risk.

There remained the knife. He had been smart to wear gloves. The knife actually belonged to Julio—Raoul had borrowed it one day and had never returned it. Now he threw it on the floor, beside the bed. There, everything was done as he had planned. He was a man of action, was he not? A man who knew how to protect what he wanted, no matter what it cost. He spat on the floor and left the room as silently as he had entered it.

The whole thing had taken less than fifteen minutes and now his raincoat was hung up in his dressing room and he was back at his usual table in the bar. A reaction had set in, and his hand was trembling. He beckoned to the waiter and ordered a double bourbon. He would sit here a few more minutes, long enough to establish his alibi, then he could go to his room and change into street clothes.

He had just finished dressing when he heard Elena in the corridor. Because Julio had not met her at the door she would be going to his room, to waken him. Raoul waited.

He didn't have long to wait. First came a long drawn-out scream, ending in a wail. Then he heard the sound of running feet.

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Raoul smiled grimly. Everything was working according to plan. He was in his room when somebody else discovered the body and notified the police. When they told him, he would act as surprised as anybody—even a little sad because, after all, the corpse was that of a blood relative. But then he would be busy comforting Elena and soon everything would be all right, just as it had been before. He crossed himself, and waited, and wished he had taken another drink.

There were more noises in the corridor—people running, voices lifted, doors slamming. At last Elena burst into his room, her eyes wild with shock. "Julio!" she cried. "Julio is dead, with a knife in his chest, and blood, blood—" She would have collapsed on the floor, but Raoul led her to a chair and when she was seated, hunched over, he stroked her hair—and waited.

When she was calmer and he felt enough time had elapsed, he said gently, tenderly, "Come on, now I'll take you to your room. Then I must go and find out what has happened."

When he was alone again, in the motel corridor, he felt somebody grab his arm. It was Alex the bartender, who said, "My God, where were you? Has anyone told you? Your cousin has been murdered. Stabbed. Who would want to kill that little guy?"

"I just heard about it," Raoul said. "Have the police been called?"

Haley, the motel manager, had phoned the police—reluctantly, because who needed trouble with the law? He appeared now, excited, nervous, followed by a crowd of customers who were thrilled because they were getting more entertainment than they had paid for. The manager locked the door of Julio's room and pocketed the key. Raoul tried to lose himself in the crowd, to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. But he was thinking.

Julio was dead. Julio, the square, the saint, who saved his pennies to return to Cuba with Elena as his bride. What he saved would not pay for a funeral in a pinewood box! He had no more need for a wife, or for a farm in Castro's land. All was over for Julio and all was beginning again for Raoul, a man who knew what he wanted to keep, and how to keep it.

The scream of a siren announced the approach of the police. Raoul steeled himself for the last hurdle. As a relative of the deceased, he knew he would have to face questioning, but he wasn't afraid. Didn't everyone talk about "dumb cops"? They would accept the burglary motive, naturally, and that would be that. They weren't about to spend the taxpayer's money carrying on a

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long search for the killer of an insignificant little orange-juice squeezer like Julio.

He watched as two policemen left their car and walked purposefully through the crowd of spectators. Then what seemed like a whole battery of cars drove up, filling the small space around the night club and the motel with uniformed cops and flashing lights. "They've got to make it look big," Raoul thought.

One man was obviously in charge and Raoul saw the crowd respectfully make way for him to pass. He was a lean six foot five, with an air of quiet assurance that impressed Raoul more than if he had been loud and blustery.

"I know that guy," Alex the bartender said in Raoul's ear. "Used to be one of the top basketball players in the state. Now I hear he's the best looey on the force. They don't put much over on him."

"All cops are dumb," Raoul said. "Don't you know that?"

"Not this one," Alex insisted. And Raoul felt the first small pulse-beat of fear.

Everyone watched as the Lieutenant entered Julio's room and directed a flashlight over the bed, the dresser, the walls and the floor. When he was finished he gave an order and the room was suddenly filled with police. Flashbulbs exploded, lab men dusted for fingerprints, an artist drew a diagram, a doctor examined the corpse, and a man scraped up something from the floor and carefully put it in an envelope. Blood, Raoul thought —Julio's blood.

Raoul was getting angry. So much fuss about the theft of four dollars and the life of a little nobody like Julio. You'd think it was the Governor of Florida, there were so many men in uniform and out, milling around. Dumb lazy cops! Well, not so lazy. And maybe not so dumb. He found himself shivering, as if a piece of ice had been rubbed along his spine.

Farther up the corridor he could hear Elena sobbing. As he listened he almost hated her. What in the world had made her seem so important to him that he'd been willing to commit murder in order to keep her? She was no Chita Rivera: she was just another girl dancer who could be taught a few steps and who knew how to shake her hips. Angrily he went back to his own room.

It wasn't long before the summons he'd been expecting came. Lieutenant Becker wanted to talk with him in the motel office. There, seated behind a dirty, cluttered desk, was the tall detective. A chair had been placed on the other side of the desk and Raoul sat down.

"You are Raoul Ortega, cousin of the deceased?"

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When he tried to answer, no sound came at first. He tried clearing his throat. "That's right," he said. "Terrible thing. I still can't believe it. Such a good guy." Raoul assumed a sad expression and looked down at the floor. He didn't like looking at the detective, anyway.

"It was you who got a room for him here, in this motel?"

"Yes, sir. He didn't know anybody, and I got him a room cheap because I work here, at the club." Big-brother act. He wished that the lifeboat in which Julio had escaped from Cuba had sunk before it ever reached shore!

"How long was he working at the juice stand?"

That was easy. "About eight months. He came to Miami from Cuba, and he had no money. A friend of mine on the Beach got him the job."

"What was the name of your friend?"

Raoul frowned. "I forget. Not a friend really, just a fellow I was talking to in one of the night spots. You know how it is."

"Did Julio make any friends? What did he do with his time when he finished work?"

Raoul hesitated. If he admitted Julio had no friends except Elena and Raoul, wouldn't that narrow the search too uncomfortably? "Sure, he had friends," he said. "The ones he met at the refugee center, and others too. But I didn't know them," he added quickly. "They were not as well educated as me. Dumb, like Julio. Foreigners."

"How about the people he worked with?" Becker had a surprisingly gentle voice for such a big tall man but his eyes seemed to bore right into your brain. Raoul squirmed.

"There was a girl on his shift, and a relief team. That was all."

Becker picked up a pencil and began tapping on the desk with it.

"I understand your partner, Miss Jiminez, and Julio were to be married soon. Is that right?"

Drops of sweat began to trickle down Raoul's forehead. How much did the Lieutenant know? How much had Elena told him? "There was some talk about it," he admitted. "But first Julio had to make enough money, and on his salary—" He shrugged and looked away.

"How long have you and Miss Jiminez been partners?"

"About a year and a half."

"You've been living here, both of you, all that time?"

"Since we got the job here, about a year ago. Yes. But she was just my partner. Strictly business, like I said. She's a nice girl." Raoul was on the defensive now—but more like a cornered rat than an agile fencer. Somehow he didn't like the way the questioning was going.

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"Look," he said. "What's this got to do with us? My cousin was robbed. Of a few lousy dollars. Would we do it, when each of us earned more than twice as much as he did? Julio had nothing and we knew it. Elena felt sorry for him, and maybe she was just kidding him along."

"I wouldn't say he had nothing," the Lieutenant said calmly. "He had nearly three hundred dollars tucked away in his socks. And he earned it the hard way."

"But where—how did he get it?" Sweat was now rolling down Raoul's face.

Becker stood up. In a few quick steps he was around the desk and looming over the frightened man in the chair.

"By working for us, that's how. You want to know the kind of man your cousin really was? A few months ago he came to complain about the dope pushers working around the juice stand. He watched them selling stuff to kids, high school kids, even smaller kids, and he didn't like it. He wanted us to stop it, so he offered to help. We told him how dangerous it was, but that didn't scare him, not one bit."

Raoul shrank in the chair, his face white. "I didn't know," he mumbled.

Becker went on as though he hadn't heard him. "Three months work down the drain. As close as we've ever been. Dumb, was he? You say Julio was dumb? He was smart enough to fool them, and that's not easy. He got names, he told us whom to watch and when. I think he might have helped us make it right up to the big boys, I don't know." Becker shook his head slowly.

Dios! How could he have guessed that Julio had been working for the police? So close-mouthed he wouldn't even tell his own cousin what he was doing. And who would think they'd use a guy like that who couldn't even speak English?

Raoul was badly shaken, but then, he thought, they can't prove anything—there was no evidence against him.

As he wriggled in the hard seat he had an idea. Maybe it was a good thing Julio had worked for the cops. It could help point suspicion somewhere else.

"One of them must have killed him, eh?" Raoul watched closely to see how Becker took it. Then Raoul added, "I was in the bar, you know, having a drink, like I always do after my act. You can ask Alex the bartender."

"Sure." The tall man mopped his face, sat down, then reached under the desk. "These are yours, aren't they?" Becker held up Raoul's dancing shoes.

"What are you doing with my shoes? Where did you get them?" Raoul's voice was hoarse.

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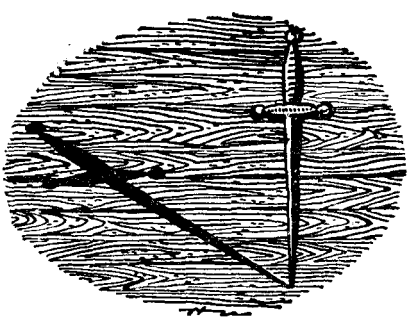
"From your dressing room. Want to know why I have them?" Becker pushed an envelope across the desk toward Raoul. "You know what this is? Wax scrapings. The kind that rubs off the floor and onto your dancing shoes. That wax made two beautiful footprints in front of Julio's dresser. We checked your shoes. They fit perfectly.

"Ortega, you're under arrest for the murder of your cousin. Also, I have to remind you not to say anything that might incriminate you, until you have a lawyer to take your case. By the way"—Lieutenant Becker pushed his chair away from the desk—"I hope Miss Jiminez can find another dancing partner. She is, as you said, a nice girl."

Raoul jumped up, talking wildly. "I didn't know, I only wanted—but I had nothing to do with drugs! The dirty rats, selling dope, I wouldn't work for them, I wouldn't do that," he finished in a scream.

"Too bad you didn't feel the same way about murder," Lieutenant Becker said grimly.



DON'T MISS

next month's 30th Anniversary Issue

(see page 161)

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Sam and Sophie had been married 23 years. A happy marriage—not exciting, but normal. Then they both "got the bug"—painting. Sophie developed into a "modern," but Sam stuck to his delicate little flower studies and his realistic little still lifes. Indeed, entirely in his own way, Sam became a specialist . . .

A SPECIALIST IN STILL LIFES

by CAROLE ROSENTHAL

THE CROWD FROM THE ART gallery next door pressed and swirled around me in the front of the restaurant. I stood, peering into faces, trying to locate my wife. We had arranged to meet here as soon as she was finished looking at the exhibition. But naturally, she was late again.

"Darling, he knows his *craft* so well, but I certainly wouldn't call him an artist," someone near me was saying.

"Did you see Sari Pendleton's sculpture? The *idea* of using *real* livestock to make her point!"

"So McLuancsque!" a voice wailed into my left ear. "Whatever happened to tradition?"

"Don't be an idiot," came the reply on my right.

Their voices, as they stood near the bar, rose like little birds of prey, circling the room and soaring above the clatter of knives, forks, and dishes. A passing elbow knocked into my ribs, and simultaneously I felt a sharp pain in my foot.

"Excuse me," I said to the man next to me, pulling my foot from under his shoe. But he looked past me to a hard-edged woman with a high, brittle black hairdo, who stroked her head absorbedly as she chattered.

I found myself gradually propelled to the back of the restaurant, where there were fewer people, and stopped near a table for two, where a small man with wispy eyebrows sat alone, hunched over a roast beef dinner.

"Do you mind if I sit here for a few minutes?" I asked. "I'm supposed to meet my wife here, and there are so many people."

He dabbed at the corner of his mouth with the napkin. "Sit down," he said. "I know how wives are."

He was a mild-looking man with a large nose that jutted out in inverse proportion to his di-

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minished chin, and with narrow sloping shoulders. He seemed misplaced among the conscientiously chic crowd from the exhibition, with their avant-garde costumes and boisterous color combinations.

"Been to the show?" he asked.

"The art show?" I shook my head.

"What else? Isn't that what *they're* all talking about?" He gestured toward the crowd, his bland gray eyes narrowing unexpectedly. "Real art lovers!"

"I wouldn't know," I said apologetically. "I'm not too big on modern art myself. Leslie, my wife, just took up painting recently, and I drove her into town to see the show."

He folded his hands comfortably on the table, regarding me with a very serious expression. "I see," he said. "My wife is also an artist." He cleared his throat.

"But I'm an artist, too," he added. "A specialist in still lifes, you might say. Yes, very still." He smiled as if he'd made a joke, and I waited for the punch line.

He stared at the table for several seconds. "Been married long?"

"Three years," I said.

"Twenty-three for me. No children, though, which I suppose in a way is a blessing." Suddenly he pointed back into the crowd.

"See that woman over there?" he said. "No, no, the skinny one leaning against the bar stool, with the expression like a hawk." He indicated the woman I had noticed earlier, with the hard-looking black hair. "Know her?"

I shook my head.

"I do. Bettina Clarke-Resnikoff." He thrust out the syllables derisively. "A friend of my wife's. Writes the art column for the *Weekly Herald*. Don't have anything to do with her!"

The intensity of his voice startled me. "What do you mean?"

He grunted. It was a deep painful sound. And I suddenly noticed that the man's apparent smallness was an affectation—a mannerism of gesture and posture—as if he had trained himself for insignificance. As he leaned back in the chair he seemed to be growing.

"If you really want an answer to that question I can tell you, but it's a long story." He retreated into a diffident shrug, and added, "In fact, I'd like to tell somebody and a stranger might understand even better than a friend."

I glanced at the wall clock behind his shoulder and nodded.

"Go ahead," I said. If he became too long-winded, Leslie would eventually rescue me.

"A lot of this story has to do with my marriage," he said, "and it's rather personal. But just bear with me and you'll get the total effect."

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Leaning back, I pulled out a cigarette and lit it. At first he spoke so softly I had to strain to hear his voice.

"You see," he began, "we had a really happy marriage. Not exciting, but normal. Sophie, my wife, was a little on the domineering side, but frankly I don't mind that. In fact, her get-up-and-go lent a spark to our relationship. We had the usual hobbies and routines—bridge with the Schwartzes on Wednesdays, and movies and TV on weekends. My wife had canasta on Tuesdays and Weight Watchers on Thursdays, and I went bowling with the boys on those nights. Then Sophie took up an interest in art."

He scratched his large nose and smiled. "Sophie started going to painting classes on Saturdays, and pretty soon she was so involved with it that she urged me to start painting, too. 'So good for your self-expression, Sam,' she told me.

"Well, she was one hundred percent right! I took to it like a duck to water and within six months we were spending most of our spare time painting. Together. It was a nice feeling, let me tell you, to look across my easel at Sophie, her face all wrinkled up with concentration, a smudge of yellow ochre on her chin, painting the same still life I was painting. Almost like newlyweds, you might say. Then—"

"You know," I interrupted the little man, leaning across the table, "that's funny. My wife has been trying to get me to paint, too."

"Don't do it!" he said sharply. "Listen!" His eyes strained the net of his lined face for a moment, before the film of mildness restored itself to his expression. "Let me go on with my story.

"Anyway, gradually Sophie started talking about entering art shows. 'What can we lose, Sam?' she asked me. And actually, she began to win. Prizes. I remember it was right after she got third prize in the Maple Hill Shopping Center Show that she told me, 'Sam, you're holding back. The reason I'm winning prizes and you're not is because you're too realistic. People like a little flair these days, you know? Something a little different.'

"But I enjoyed doing realistic paintings, and I don't understand this modern stuff, anyway. So I kept on with the still lifes. Only Sophie was really outpacing me. The next thing, a couple of the exclusive ladies' art clubs asked her to join. And Sophie made all new friends. But since the meetings were for members only, I never met the people she was running around with, and pretty soon we weren't even speaking the same language. She'd look at my paintings and say things like, 'Lacks lyrical qualities,' and 'No

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creative tension between the colors.' Now, how can you answer charges like that?

"Our whole routine began to collapse. She even wanted to give up our weekly bridge with the Schwartzes.

"Then she met Bettina Clarke-Resnikoff."

The little man's face became suffused with color, and his hands on the table knotted. For several seconds his eyes hardened and fixed on the back of the black-haired woman still chattering shrilly at the bar.

"That was what really changed everything. I could put up with a lot, but this—well, I put up with it, too—but it was too much!

"Bettina Clarke-Resnikoff is a woman who can best be described as a vampire. An articulate vampire, that woman haunting the fringes of arty events, sucking from the artists, and dissecting them out loud or in print as soon as she has a chance. The major thing she's big on is accusing people of being unoriginal. As soon as she understands something she denounces it. And because she talks louder and more often than anyone else, people take her as an expert.

"Well, she began to cultivate Sophie. Maybe she thought Sophie was really talented, or maybe she just wanted to make trouble. Who knows? But they spent hours on the phone with each other every day. And naturally, the next thing I start hearing about is originality. As soon as I come down to breakfast—by this time it's cold cereal instead of hot pancakes, since Sophie's so busy—I hear pronouncements on who's original and who's not original. In no time at all *nothing* is original enough for my wife!

" 'Sam, we're not living *originally* enough. We have to change the furniture.' And out goes my comfortable green armchair and in comes some clear, blow-up plastic model that deflates every time I sit on it.

" 'Sam, don't you think bowling is a waste of time? Bettina says all the really *original* people are taking up improvisational dance.'

" 'And my painting—well, whoever heard of realism in the mid-twentieth century? 'You might as well take a snapshot, Sam,' Sophie tells me.

"Meanwhile, she converts my den into a studio for herself, since she's started doing these twelve-foot collages out of beer pretzels. Crumbs all over the house! But I don't mind. I work small anyway, so I use a corner of the garage for painting. But what *did* bother me was that *everything* seemed to be changing. Even *Sophie* looked different to me from week to week. And on the day I came home from work and she presented me with an architect's plans for an ovum-

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shaped house I knew that things were coming to a head. It was only a matter of time before Sophie would realize that *I* was too unoriginal for her.

"Exactly two weeks and three days later, Sophie came into the garage where I was painting a delicate little flower study. She planted her hands on her day-glo hip-huggers and just stood looking at me for a few minutes.

" 'Sam,' she said, making her voice very hard and flat, 'I've thought it over carefully. I've also discussed it at length with Bettina. We just don't have anything in common any more. I'm becoming so original—as a personality, I mean—and you're so ordinary. I want a divorce.'

"I just stood there. Although I'd been half expecting it, still it took me by surprise. I couldn't get a word out, even though I could feel my lips moving and something like static was crackling in the back of my head. Hadn't I gone along with all her schemes?

" 'It's no use talking about it, Sam,' she said. 'My mind is made up.'

" 'But, Sophie—' I stammered.

"She came over and put her hand on my arm. 'I'm sorry, Sammy,' she said. 'We've had twenty-three good years together, but I didn't really know who I was during that time, and now I'm beginning to find myself. Besides, you know you haven't been happy during the past few months. You don't want to change! You like to stand still. You're so predictable!'

"And suddenly she broke off and started to chuckle. She pointed to my little painting and shook her head.

" 'You see what I mean, Sam, don't you? It's not as if you *couldn't* be original—I mean *anybody* could be—but look at what you're doing right now. Look at this painting! That's just what Bettina meant all along, but I always used to defend you. No originality! Completely predictable! Sam, I want a divorce immediately. I know now you'll never do anything new!"

"I felt very confused. By the time answering words came pouring out—I still don't remember what I said—I found that my fingers had fastened tight around her throat and my thumbs had pressed against her windpipe.

" 'Predictable, am I? You think I'm completely predictable?' and I can still see her laughing at her astonishment—at *my* astonishment—as her hands flapped feebly against my shoulder. She stared wide-eyed at me and her tongue protruded. It was quite funny.

"Small parched sounds came from her mouth. When I finally unknotted my fingers from her throat she sagged against me. Then she fell to the concrete floor

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and her head hit with a dull thwacking noise.

"She didn't move. And as I looked down at her I was struck by her helplessness. Gently I slipped a pile of old art magazines under her head. She had such a bulge-eyed expression of surprise on her face! And even though I knew something was wrong I must admit that I *liked* the way she looked.

"And then I got *my* idea! I wanted to paint her. A memento and a tribute! Just as she was, where she was. Why not? All my life I had been balking at unusual ideas, but why not break out of that rut? Besides, my paints were already out.

"So I began. And although my first idea had been to capture her expression of surprise, as I thought about it the urge for something more abstract, more expressionistic, came over me. Hadn't Sophie encouraged me to be original?

"So I painted her eyes a rich purple, and in light strokes of the brush I made her nose yellow. The cheeks were a deep cobalt blue. Then I painted her mouth an acid green—very vivid—but it didn't work very well because paint kept dribbling from the corners of her lips. I guess it's because I had only worked on canvas. And being unused to experimental surfaces I couldn't get the right consistency for the skin—"

"Wait a minute!" My knee struck the table as I jerked upright in the chair. This was incredible! "You don't mean you were painting directly *on* her skin?"

"Didn't I say I was painting her?" he said. He passed his fingers over his forehead, looking vaguely puzzled and alarmed. "I thought I mentioned it.

"Well, by the time I was finished , Sophie looked pretty interesting. Actually it was the most unique thing I had done in my whole life, and I admired her for quite a while before it occurred to me to check her pulse. But of course, just as I'd thought, she was dead.

"At that point, though, the full implication of what I'd done hit me. I panicked. I didn't know what to do. There was my wife of twenty-three years stretched out and painted from head to toe, as colorful as a Byzantine mosaic. Painting her had seemed like a good idea, but when I thought about calling the doctor, or the police, I knew it would look very bizarre.

"Then I remembered something. So I went into the house and checked the calendar. Sure enough, Sophie had written down that this art show was today, and she had already reserved a space in it. So I strapped her to a frame, crated her up very carefully, drove down here, and entered her in the show. Maybe

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you saw her—she's hanging in the center gallery against the right-hand wall as you walk in. The light's not very good, but a lot of people were crowded around when I walked by a while ago."

"But you're mad!" I exclaimed.

"Do you think so?" he asked, raising an eyebrow. "I would have said so, too. But do you know what B e t t i n a Clarke-Resnikoff commented when she saw my entry in the show?"

"What?" I whispered.

" 'Highly original. Is it your own idea?' "

He smiled ironically and raised his napkin to his lips.

I stared at him. Preposterous! He must be mad! How could I gracefully excuse myself and alert the police? The important thing, of course, was not to panic.

"*Darling,* I'm so sorry to keep you waiting!" Leslie, my wife, had squeezed through the crowded restaurant without my seeing her, and she stood at our table now, pulling off her gloves. "It was the most unusual show."

She paused, looking at the little man, then back to me. Evidently she was waiting for an introduction, though it took me a moment to remember to behave normally.

"My wife, Leslie," I said. "This is Mr.—?"

"Roseman," he said, half rising behind the table. "Sam Roseman."

Leslie beamed. "Not *the* Sam Roseman?"

He shrugged, embarrassed.

"Well, congratulations!" Leslie pumped his hand up and down. "You know, your entry just won first prize!"

For a moment the little man looked startled. He puckered his forehead and scratched the tip of his nose. A wide smile spread across his face.

"My wife shares in t h i s triumph," he said, sliding his eyes sideways at me. Abruptly I rose and pulled Leslie toward the front door.

"Really, darling," Leslie protested as I pushed our way through the crowded restaurant, "I wish you were more interested in culture. You didn't have to act so rude to the man just because you don't understand art. After all—"

Suddenly she broke off and began waving enthusiastically to the brittle, black-haired woman at the bar.

I dropped her arm. Had the whole world gone mad? "Do you know *her?*"

"That's Sam Roseman's wife," Leslie said, tucking her hand in mine. "Really a nice woman. And I understand her husband is a very original, extremely w i t t y person. Were you talking to him long?"

I turned slowly around toward the table. The little man, catching my eye, was lowering one eyelid in a careful, deadpan wink.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Today the London Detection Club still flourishes as of yore. Having spoken much of that particular group, perhaps I may mention another projected club, just as excellent of intent, which never quite got off the ground—or came down from up in the air.

Also in London, one night towards the close of the nineteen thirties, some dozen or more of us assembled for dinner at the hospitable home of Fryn Tennyson Jesse and her husband, H. M. Harwood. Our purpose was to inaugurate a club for the study and discussion of picturesque murders from real life.

In one corner the most distinguished-looking man present, A. E. W. Mason of ambassadorial profile and silver hair, sat communing with a cigar. I remember Mrs. Belloc Lowndes, who was to read a paper on Lizzie Borden; garrulous Sir Hugh Walpole; still more garrulous Harry Hodge, Edinburgh publisher of the *Notable British Trials;* and benevolent Charles S. Evans, high khan at William Heinemann Ltd.

What should be the name of our group? Uproar broke out at once. Everybody called for something different, almost everybody was vociferous, and none of the vociferous would shut up. Worn down at length by Harry Hodge, who had edited a collection of gory prefaces called *The Black Maria,* we agreed to be the Black Maria Club. Then arose the question of whom we should admit.

"For instance," somebody asked, "ought we to admit judges?"

Though I anticipated small difficulty here, thinking we might count ourselves lucky if we got any judges at all, objection had been entered by a stubborn soul who seemed to have based his views on the conduct of Judge Jeffreys. Majority vote finally decided that these miscreants might be admitted if they behaved.

"Need we confine ourselves to murder?" observed a gentle-faced lady. "Surely there are other crimes of equal fascination?"

Challenged to state one, she made several suggestions which the brethren greeted in a mood ranging from scorn to ribaldry. We argued this, we argued that, we went on arguing until a glance

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at the clock showed we had left time for nothing but to adjourn.

Out we went into the night. Subsequent suggestions of resuming activity produced little beyond more debate. Hitler's War intervened to wrench every life awry. The Black Maria Club does not exist; it never existed; the first meeting was also the last.

Such reflections have been inspired by the first of four items I would praise this month, the brilliant new biography of a man once powerful if shadowy—seeming in the American underworld during its most controversial age. Though I can offer you no first-class new fiction, let the biography be supported by three paperback novel reprints, all British: one comparatively recent fair-play detective story, one detective classic of forty years ago, and one classic of espionage from World War I.

In *Johnny Torrio, First of the Gang Lords,* by Jack McPhaul (Arlington House, $8.95), several violent generations have been reconstructed with the vividness of the veteran reporter and the care of the academic historian, for a story as rip-roaring as it is accurate.

Born near Naples in the early eighteen eighties, taken to New York as an infant, John Torrio was learning many ways of profit before in youth he left Manhattan for Chicago. He had learned the importance of controlling booze and owning brothels, though he neither drank, smoked, gambled, nor philandered. And Torrio himself never pulled a trigger; he just gave orders.

With the advent of prohibition he had gained great power, and went on to power still greater. Young Alphonse Capone, out from Brooklyn, was put to work as bouncer in one of Torrio's brothels, whence Capone rose to be chief lieutenant. Big Scarface Al, who exulted in publicity, took the spotlight for himself and left his boss in shadow according to the boss's wish. Once disaster brushed near, when O'Bannion's hoods tried to blast Torrio before Torrio's hoods did blast O'Bannion. J.T. survived, with only a scarred neck.

Survived? He tried retirement in Italy, and slipped back here only when Il Duce threatened to jail Yankee gangsters of Italian birth. And his luck held. After a heart attack at the barber's (1957), he died in peace, prosperity, and a hospital bed, at the mature age of 75. There may be a moral here, but it's not easy to find.

In *Let's Choose Executors,* by Sara Woods (Popular Library, 75¢), another tricky murder mystery inspires sensational courtroom drama for the talents of that very engaging barrister, Antony Maitland.

At ancient and provincial Chedcombe, on New Year's Eve, ancient

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and matriarchal Mrs. Randall has been poisoned after cutting immediate kin from her will and leaving a fortune to her hapless young goddaughter, Fran Gifford. Pinned in a corner by motive, opportunity, every semblance of guilt, Fran seems lost. The barrister originally defending her sees no line of protection; neither do the instructing solicitors.

But Antony Maitland, who can carry sympathy to the point of quixotry in juggling hot potatoes for a distressed client, accepts her innocence though he knows she's been telling lies. Here it's barrister-detective all the way, from clue to clue and a courtroom disclosure wholly credible. Outstanding; don't miss.

A twentieth-century Jack the Ripper plies his knife with full grisliness throughout Philip MacDonald's *Murder Gone Mad* (Avon, 95¢), first published just forty years ago.

Calling himself the Butcher, terrorizing ultra-respectable Holmdale, this maniac can't be nabbed by the deductions of the brilliant amateur, but only by organized police work. Therefore we bypass nerves-on-edge Colonel Gethyrn; our protagonist is another old friend, Scotland Yard Superintendent Arnold Pike.

There are the suspects, named and lined up; which can it be? After several slips Pike's last ingenious trap snares the Butcher under circumstances as horrifying as they are dramatically effective. *Murder Gone Mad* has become murder gone sane.

Speaking of classics, it is time to reassess *The 39 Steps,* by John Buchan (Popular Library, 60¢), that early novel of espionage in the apparently settled world of Britain just before it burst into flames with the holocaust of 1914.

Much blood has flowed, many customs have altered, since those far-off days when the heroine of a spy chronicle did not strip off her clothes and jump into bed with the hero ten minutes after she met him. In fact, there is no heroine in the story. Told by Scottish-born Richard Hannay, who has returned to London from South Africa and become an innocent fugitive on the run, its wild doings sweep us across the Scottish moors, into comedy as well as danger, while Hannay tracks down the agents of the Black Stone.

John Buchan afterwards wrote more adventures of Richard Hannay and his friends, creating notable villains too: vicious Colonel von Stumm in *Greenmantle* or godlike Dominic Medina in *The Three Hostages.* But none has greater effect than the man who could hood his eyes like a hawk, and does so here until, in a literal sense, the whistle is blown at last.

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two for the

DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

In the May 1970 issue of EQMM we presented a pair of "first stories"—Dante Stirpe's "Grandma's Insomnia" and Mary Barrett's "The Silver Saltcellar." As luck would have it, these two new authors both sent in their second stories during the same week. It was inevitable that we should take advantage of this coincidence by publishing Mr. Stirpe's and Miss Barrett's second stories as another pair, back to back—which we now do. The two first stories were, you will recall, completely different from each other; the two second stories are also as different from each other as a grateful editor could possibly hope for. Ah, the infinite variety within the mystery genre—a never-lessening wonder to behold! . . .

MACDOUGAL STREET BLUES

by DANTE STIRPE

AFTER LEAVING MACDOUGAL Street I needed quiet and a place to think, so I went to the office where I worked—McCreedy's Insurance Agency. The police tracked me down there two hours later. They can work fast when they've got something to go on. They had my gun.

A Lieutenant Bleecker was in charge—a tall cadaverous man with a polite, icy manner and pale blue eyes to match. His partner, a dark heavy-set number with the unlikely name of Cadenza, leaned on the door frame and mutilated a toothpick. Bleecker pulled a revolver out of his pocket and showed it to me.

"This is yours, Mr. Brody. You registered it with us over a year ago."

"I'll take your word for it, Lieutenant."

He nodded. "It was found under the body of one Frank Galley, at thirty-three Macdougal Street. This afternoon. You were there, Mr. Brody?"

I hesitated and he slid in

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smoothly, "We have witnesses, Mr. Brody. Two young girls who gave a surprisingly good description. They even noticed the color of your socks."

"I was there."

They hustled me downtown and ten minutes later I sat across from Bleecker in his spare, cramped office. A police stenographer joined us while Bleecker was informing me of my rights. I told him I'd forego a lawyer till later. He frowned over that but didn't comment.

"Why did you go to Macdougal Street, Mr. Brody?"

"I got these anonymous phone calls."

His eyebrows went up like a couple of flags and he peered at me as if I'd just told him I heard voices.

"Anonymous phone calls?"

"Yes, two yesterday, and one this morning."

"Tell me about them, Mr. Brody."

The first one came after my mid-morning coffee break.

"Brody?"

A low hoarse voice, as if the caller had laryngitis.

"Speaking."

"Your wife meets him at two o'clock, Brody. Tomorrow, Saturday. On Macdougal Street."

Click.

I held the dead phone tight enough to crack it, paralyzed with shock. Suddenly my stomach was filled with shaved ice and I shuddered. What kind of creep would make a call like that? I hung up slowly. The wet stain on the phone wouldn't dry in the thick cloying heat, so I mopped at it absently with my handkerchief.

Who? Who was it she was meeting?

It was a few minutes before I recovered, but when I did I knew he'd call again. I didn't have the full address.

The second call came at 3:00, while I was going over a client's health report.

"Your wife meets him on Macdougal Street, Brody. Number thirty-three. Apartment twenty-one."

Click.

Same voice. And not a noise in the background to identify.

Who? Who was it she was meeting? It gnawed at me the rest of the afternoon, as it had that morning. Only worse.

"And the third call?" Bleecker asked.

"A repeat of the second."

He nodded. "And the calls made you curious?"

"Yes, I had to know who."

"You didn't have any idea, Mr. Brody?"

"Well, not really."

"That sounds like an evasion, Mr. Brody. You agreed to answer all the questions."

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"Well, it's only a suspicion, Lieutenant, nothing definite. But after I started working for McCreedy, about two or three months ago—"

"McCreedy?" Bleecker interrupted. "You mean Walter McCreedy, the insurance broker?"

I nodded.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, about two or three months ago my wife began dropping into the office pretty frequently. Something she almost never did before, on my previous jobs. She'd stop and say hello to me but she'd spend a lot of time with McCreedy. I know that sounds pretty thin. Anyway, I can't see Walt inviting a woman down to Macdougal Street for an affair. He'd use a motel or his summer cottage on the lake."

"I see. So you went there because you wondered who else your wife might be seeing."

"Not who else, Lieutenant. Just who. I never considered McCreedy seriously."

Apparently he didn't either. He changed the subject.

"You knew Frank Galley, Mr. Brody?"

"Yes, I met him in a bar some time back and we've had some beers together three or four times."

"No other business together, Mr. Brody?"

I shook my head. "No other business, Lieutenant."

"If I put some men on it they might turn up something."

He was searching my face for a reaction, but I just shrugged. "You're welcome to try."

He scowled and reached into a drawer for a pipe and pouch of tobacco.

"Tell me about Macdougal Street, Mr. Brody."

Macdougal Street was on the other side of town from the agency, and number 33 would be far to the south, in the kind of section most cities were tearing down. I found the number easily, but I drove around the corner and parked at the mouth of an alley that bisected the block, hoping to go in the back way, unobserved. But a group of girls playing skip-rope farther up the alley shot that idea. I left the car there anyway and walked back.

The front hall was dim and smelled of stale food and rotting wood. Sand and scraps of paper crackled underfoot as I climbed the stairs. A single bulb halfway down the second floor hall cast a weak light that barely reached the door marked 21. The number was barely visible. Brush strokes and tiny bubbles were frozen in the mud-colored varnish.

The door had a slimy feel. I pulled out my handkerchief and wiped the sweat off my face and neck. Quit stalling, Brody. It's two o'clock.

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I wrapped the handkerchief around the knob, turned it, and pushed slowly. The door opened with a slight creak and I was inside. I put away my handkerchief and shut the door.

Across the room a worn and faded maroon couch hulked in front of a dirty window. A low battered table stood before the couch, barren. And to one side there was a varnished straight-backed chair with broken slats. That was all. Nothing personal.

There was an open doorway in the right-hand wall and by craning my neck I could make out a clawed foot of an ancient bathtub. A door in the left wall was closed. Suddenly I knew my wife would never meet anyone here for a bedroom scene—not in these sordid surroundings. I'd been stupid to come.

I was turning to leave when I heard the noise. A scratching sound. From behind the closed door. Hackles rose instantly on my neck and I froze, waiting. The noise came again. Like fingernails clicking on wood. I knew I should leave, but the urge to find out who was behind the door was too strong. I crossed the room and pulled the door open.

It was Frank Galley, his right hand scratching feebly on the door frame. His left was suspended near his chest, wrist flexing, the fingers clawing vaguely at nothing. Black hair fell across his forehead down to half-closed eyes. His thin sallow face was covered with brightly sparkling sweat. I clamped my throat against the nausea rising in me as I saw the blood, a rich red-brown, pumping slowly from two ugly holes in his chest.

Suddenly his left hand stopped clawing and his right dropped from the door frame. Without support, he settled and began a half turn, as one leg gave way, then the other. He crumpled in horrible slow motion, finally rolling on his right side. Then he lay still. Under his left leg protruded the blued end of a gun barrel.

I stared at him, stupidly. What the hell was he doing here?

The tiny bedroom beyond was a shambles. A chair knocked over, the bed skewed from the wall, its mattress awry, a lamp shattered on the floor, the shade crushed. He'd put up one hell of a fight. Or maybe just scurried from one wall to another in panic, dodging bullets. I counted three fresh scars in the plaster. How could anybody miss at that range?

I was pulling out my handkerchief again when I heard the siren. Faint but unmistakable. And coming for me. I was sure of [illegible] before I [illegible] turned [illegible]wn the [illegible]nd had spun ar[illegible]el post look-

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ing for the back door. I found it, paused a second to catch my breath, then stepped out into the sunshine. And walked s l o w l y through the debris in the yard, in case somebody was watching. Somebody was. Several g i r l s who'd been playing skip-rope were running up the alley toward the siren. But two had stayed behind and they watched me with open stares. I nodded to them and turned down the alley to my car.

"So he was alive when you got there," Bleecker said, p u f f i n g slowly on his pipe.

I stared at him. "If you want to call it that."

He nodded absently. "I could hold you for Galley's murder. Your gun and you were there."

My confidence slowly oozed away. He hadn't believed anything I'd told him.

Desperately I said, "But you won't."

He scowled again. "Won't I?"

"You'll have to explain the anonymous call *you* got. There had to be one. The timing was too good."

He smiled, a small crooked smile. "Wondered when you'd think of that. Yes, we got one. The voice was disguised, but the officer who took the call thinks it was a woman who made it."

We stared at each other. So far only one woman had been mentioned. My wife.

I shook my head stubbornly. "No. Not Beth. I don't believe—"

"Then how'd your gun get down there?"

Behind me the door opened and somebody said, "Lieutenant?"

Bleecker rose and went out, indicating on the way that I stay put. The stenographer exchanged his notebook for a newspaper and began working on the crossword puzzle. I smoked.

Forty minutes went by before Bleecker returned. He wasn't exactly smiling but he l o o k e d pleased with himself.

"You implied earlier that you and your wife weren't getting along, Mr. Brody? Just how bad was it?"

I looked at him in surprise. "I didn't say that, Lieutenant. What I said was—"

I stopped. He knew something I didn't. And that made me cautious. He stared at me, waiting for an answer.

I took a deep breath. "Well, Lieutenant, I guess our marriage started going sour about a year ago. I couldn't settle down. Lots of different jobs. No drive, no ambition." I smiled wryly. "What she meant was, I didn't have a ten-room house she could show off and a fat mortgage to go with it. I wasn't a big success."

"And the last few months?" Bleecker said. "Since you began working for McCreedy?"

He knew something, all right.

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"The last few months our marriage kind of went to hell on skates, Lieutenant. She was mad at me most of the time. And edgy, as if she felt guilty about something. I'd get home from work and find a note and a TV dinner. She knows I hate TV dinners, and the note wouldn't say where she was."

"So she could've been seeing McCreedy."

I shrugged. "Sure. She could've been seeing anybody. I didn't spy on her, Lieutenant. I figured we'd either work it out or get divorced. I was just waiting to find out which."

He gazed at me in silence a long minute. "We picked up your wife about an hour ago, Mr. Brody. I've just talked to her."

I sat up sharply. "Beth? Why?"

"Not why, Mr. Brody, but where."

"Where," I parroted.

"Galley had a small shack by the river. Ever been there?"

I shook my head. "I didn't even know where he lived."

"Ah, but your wife did, Mr. Brody. She stalled her car only a block away, on a railroad crossing. Two officers patrolling the area noticed the trouble she was in and stopped to help. When she saw the officers, Mr. Brody, she almost went hysterical. Naturally they brought her in."

"Naturally," I said. "The best way to treat a hysterical woman."

He frowned. "I exaggerated a little. She was very nervous. Excited. That was the reason she stalled the car in the first place—flooded it. And she won't say why she was down there. Not exactly her part of town, if you know what I mean, Mr. Brody."

"Where is she now?"

He crooked a finger. "A few doors away, under guard."

"I'd better go see her."

"Pardon me if I sound brutal, Mr. Brody, but she doesn't want to see you. She wants to see McCreedy. And a lawyer."

We stared at each other through a heavy silence while he made small sucking noises on his pipe. Finally he reached for a folder of matches.

"Becoming clearer, isn't it, Mr. Brody?"

"Not to me, Lieutenant."

He got his pipe lit, then took it out of his mouth and pointed it at me.

"Your wife was seeing McCreedy, and Galley caught them at it. Took pictures, got hold of letters—something solid. And blackmailed them. Probably hit them for money once or twice, and they paid, because they were scared not to. But he hit them again, and this time they killed him, framing you for the murder. That's why your wife was down at Galley's—to recover the money."

I shook my head. "You

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fabricated that out of pure air. Galley wouldn't know my wife from last year's Miss America. I mean, he wouldn't know he should blackmail her."

"In the first place," Bleecker explained patiently, "my theory fits the facts. And in the second place, maybe Galley didn't know your wife, but he did know McCreedy. Almost everybody knows McCreedy. He's a joiner. Kiwanis, Lions, Chamber of Commerce, and so on and so on. He belongs to more clubs than I knew existed. And his wife runs him a close second. Ladies' this and Ladies' that. What amazes me is that they saw each other often enough and long enough to have three kids."

I had to admire him. The case wasn't four hours old, but he'd done his homework.

I shrugged, suddenly very tired. "I don't know. Maybe you're right."

"I'd bet my shirt on it." He rose. "I'd better see if McCreedy and his lawyer got here."

I had a bright idea. "Check her hands for nitrates, Lieutenant."

He stiffened and his face turned frigid. "Don't tell me my job, Mr. Brody."

He went out.

Another heavy silence. This one lasted almost an hour. When Bleecker returned he was pale and shaken. He sat down heavily, sighed, and stared at the wall behind me, mumbling something about hating his job. I didn't believe that. He was a man who enjoyed his work.

Finally he looked at me. "Your wife confessed to murdering Frank Galley. McCreedy's an accessory. It happened just like I said."

I shook my head slowly. "I just can't believe it, Lieutenant. What'd you do to her?"

"Questioned her, that's all. She'd been coming apart piece by piece, anyway. Under terrific strain. And waiting for McCreedy didn't help. I asked questions for a while but didn't get anywhere. She wouldn't answer or she lied. So transparent, damn it! Does she think cops are completely stupid?"

I said nothing. He brushed hair from his forehead.

"Anyway, I told her we'd find witnesses to place her on Macdougal Street. She was wearing gloves, white gloves, and I asked her for them, so we could test 'em. Not the nitrate test—not conclusive one way or the other. We found white lint on your revolver." He squinted at me. "Didn't tell you that, did I? Told her about the lint and she fell apart. Started babbling. Even McCreedy's lawyer couldn't stop her. I've seen it before. As if they can get rid of it by telling somebody, even a cop. We're sweating McCreedy now."

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He didn't look happy about any of it.

"And the money?"

"Yes, the money. Galley told her where it was—she held a gun on him. Then she shot him. The money was hidden under a loose floorboard under his bed, but when she looked it wasn't there. He hit them twice—ten thousand each time. On his third try they decided to shoot him."

I whistled. "Didn't know McCreedy had that much dough lying around."

Bleecker shook his head. "Seven thousand from her, thirteen from him."

"Seven from her?"

"Yes."

"Inheritance from her mother. Been hanging on to it for years. Wouldn't spend a dime. She must have been furious when she had to give it to Galley. Where is she?"

"Hospital, under guard. They'll give her something—sedative. Maybe she'll be all right tomorrow. I wouldn't try seeing her till then."

"No." I got up. "Through with me, then?"

He nodded and I went out. We didn't say goodbye.

Outside it had cooled off and the fresh air felt good. I stood on the steps of the station and breathed deeply. All over. What a relief. I needed a beer.

All over. Home free.

A few minutes later I was sitting in a booth sipping a beer slowly, enjoying the cool bright taste of it. Then I spotted Galley making his way from the bar toward me. He had a beer, too. No, it wasn't Galley, just somebody who looked like him.

"Hello, Mr. Brody." A voice as sweet and slippery as a canned peach.

I said stiffly. "I don't think I know you."

He showed his teeth in an empty smile. "Sam Galley, Mr. Brody. My brother Frank got himself killed this afternoon. As I guess you know, seeing you just came from the police station."

Suddenly I was packed in ice. "I didn't know Frank had a brother."

"Yeah. Well, he did. And Sam Galley drives a real tough bargain, Mr. Brody. He ain't soft, like Frank was."

I waited him out.

"He told me about your partnership with him, Mr. Brody. That twenty-five seventy-five split don't sit too good with me. He took all the risk. You just gave him the pictures and told him what to do."

"I didn't send him the third time. That was his own—"

"Tough, Mr. Brody. So he was greedy. Ain't we all. I already got his share. Found it under the floor. Now I want yours. The whole fifteen thousand."

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Just after we accepted her second story, Mary Barrett lifted the curtain of mystery about herself. At the time of this writing she is in her early forties and has spent her whole adult life "doing things with words—as a newspaper feature writer and as an editor of juvenile books and editor-writer for an encyclopedia." Now she is free-lancing and concentrating almost entirely on fiction . . .

DEATH OUT OF SEASON

by MARY BARRETT

MISS WITHERSPOON crouched low to the ground and with her little trowel turned over some earth in her herb garden. She silently reminded herself not to cultivate too closely lest the tender roots of the herbs be damaged. Miss Witherspoon was a very careful gardener, as results testified. Her flowers and herbs were the most luxuriant in town; they were, if her neighbors had had the grace to confess it, the envy of everyone.

Britomar rubbed herself against Miss Witherspoon's ankle, purring. Miss Witherspoon idly patted the black cat with her gloved left hand.

"Hello, Miss Witherspoon," a woman called from the sidewalk beyond the white picket fence. It was Mrs. Laurel, the stylishly dressed divorcee who had recently moved into the neighborhood. "Are you fixing those little May baskets I've heard so much about?" she asked, her mock-friendly tone failing to hide her disdain.

Miss Witherspoon straightened from her task. "Yes, I am," she said with cool politeness. Mrs. Laurel smiled condescendingly and went on her way. Miss Witherspoon continued her work, hardly acknowledging the interruption. She had more pressing matters to attend to than Mrs. Laurel's impertinence.

In any case, Miss Witherspoon was accustomed to mockery; for over the years she had become famed as the town eccentric. It

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is true that other people in town deviated from the usual in various ways—drunkards, feeble-minded people, even one murderer if you counted Jake Holby's beating the life from his skinny wife when he discovered her in the barn loft with his hired hand. Yet none of this aberrant behavior was considered nearly as peculiar as old Miss Witherspoon's insistence on total privacy. Not one person had ever been inside her little house; and only the most reckless boys, egged on by absolutely irresistible dares, ventured through the gate or over the white picket fence onto her well-manicured lawn, and then only in the dark of night after the old woman was asleep.

Years before, the town children had made up a taunting chant which was still being sung with glee: "Miss Witherspoon/Is a goon." Although the children thought this was hilariously witty, few of them ever dared to intone it in the old woman's hearing; for, though they hated to admit it to themselves or to each other, the children were frightened of her.

Never in the memory of anyone living had Miss Witherspoon spoken spontaneously to any person she passed on the sidewalk; nor had she ever called neighborly greetings across her fence. She had never brought soup to the ailing, or cakes to the bereaved. In short, she observed none of the usual social rituals. If anyone had ever dared to ask her why, and if she had chosen to respond, she would have said that she preferred plants to people, primarily because plants did not sin, were incapable of evil. Furthermore, by preserving her solitude, she was better able to observe, objectively, the misdeeds of those around her.

However, Miss Witherspoon did have one more-or-less social ritual of her own which she faithfully performed once a year, on Walpurgis Night. It was that annual event to which Mrs. Laurel had referred, but Mrs. Laurel did not know, nor did anyone else for that matter, the ritual in its entirety. This year, for the first time, Miss Witherspoon entertained the thought of altering her pattern slightly. She was, after all, growing old, and the arthritis in her fingers was becoming increasingly a handicap. There might not be enough years left for her to carry out her entire program. Perhaps this year, just for once, she should take care of two people rather than one. But no, she finally decided. Once a pattern was successfully set it was best to stick to it.

Walpurgis Night was the only date in the year which had any significance for Miss Witherspoon, the only one which she marked on her calendar. It was the eve

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of May Day, named for an English missionary and abbess who had won renown by driving out witches. As everyone who has read Sir James Frazer knows, that night above all others is the one when witches are most likely to be abroad.

On Walpurgis Eve each year Miss Witherspoon prepared exactly ten May baskets. And every year, on that night, she stealthily hung them on the doorknobs of ten houses. It was never the same ten houses, although over the years she had been forced to repeat occasionally. And every year one, and only one, May basket was especially chosen to contain a particularly interesting lagniappe.

Of course, the town people knew the identity of their May Day benefactor. Only Miss Witherspoon's garden could provide such an abundant variety of flowers and herbs.

It was a game among the townspeople to speculate who would be favored by the little baskets of flowers and herbs, which were inevitably accompanied by a verse or a saying penned in Miss Witherspoon's careful hand. Everyone tittered over this annual proof of the old woman's eccentricity. What they failed to notice was that each year the recipient of one basket met with a strange and unexpected fate.

Well, no matter. Miss Witherspoon sought no fame or credit for her work.

The sun shone warm and comforting on her back as she carefully chose and picked the flowers for each basket. She savored in her mind their lovely Latin names—Lathyrus odoratus (sweet pea), Lobularia maritima (sweet alyssum), Convallaria majalis (lily of the valley), and, of course, the fabled hyacinth which sprang from the blood of Apollo's dying friend—"that sanguine flower inscribed with woe."

At last the baskets were filled and she set them in the cool shade of the maple tree. And now for the final, the most important, decision. Which herb would be chosen for the favored tenth basket? Miss Witherspoon could use the rootstock from the May apple; but that was not, perhaps, pretty enough to capture interest. Larkspur might serve; but that would mean drying the seeds, and perhaps that entailed more trouble than was necessary.

For the sake of symbolism she was tempted to use the "beautiful lady" flower, belladonna, or, for the same reason, monkshood. But no. The best choice was Digitalis purpurea, foxglove. It was true that her garden held only the American variety, Phytolacca americana, and she hated the ugly sound of its American name, pokeweed. But still, the dark

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purple berries were pretty and they would serve her purpose well. So into the tenth basket they went, along with a verse from Rudyard Kipling which she had copied in her neat handwriting:

Excellent herbs had our fathers of old—
Excellent herbs to ease their pain.

She had added, as if in afterthought, "The purple berries, served in any form, will make even a laggard in love become ardent, and an ardent lover passionate beyond belief."

Miss Witherspoon regretted having to resort to such an outright lie, for she was a true artist and would have preferred her annual ritual to be perfect in all its parts. However, she would have to forgive herself this one false detail in the interest of her larger plan.

That night Miss Witherspoon set out, accompanied only by Britomar. The moonlight was bright, and there was the feel of spring in the warm moist air. Miss Witherspoon happily quoted to herself from *The Merchant of Venice*:

In such a night
Medea gather'd the enchanted herbs.

Nine baskets were hung, and then the tenth—on Mrs. Laurel's door.

Two days later, Edward Johnston, the tailor, died a painful and inexplicable death, the victim of some violent emetic accidentally ingested and apparently served to him in some food prepared by the attractive divorcee. For, strangest fact of all, he died not in his own home, with his wife and four children, but in the house of Miss Witherspoon's glamorous neighbor. Only Miss Witherspoon, in all the town, was not surprised that he should die there; for only she had observed the tailor's frequent clandestine visits, and only she had surmised which of the ten commandments was being broken within the walls of Mrs. Laurel's house.

The morning after this shocking news had spread throughout the town Miss Witherspoon was working peacefully in her garden, as usual, when a highly unusual visitor arrived. The Sheriff picked his way toward her across the stepping stones.

"Good morning, Miss Witherspoon," he called across the close-clipped lawn.

She looked up from her flowerbed. "Good morning, Sheriff," she said calmly. "You wish to talk with me?"

"Yes, I do." The Sheriff's uncertain tone of voice betrayed his discomfort and his doubts. Now that he looked at her she seemed innocent beyond question, incapable of harming anyone. And yet, when his theory had finally jelled that morning, it had seemed

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sound to him—in a strange way.

"Let's go indoors," Miss Witherspoon suggested, "where we can have a nice talk."

The two went into her cool, dimly lit living room and sat down in chairs facing each other across a tea table. Britomar jumped into Miss Witherspoon's lap and the old lady caressed the cat as she spoke. "I have been expecting you for years," she said.

"You have?" the Sheriff exclaimed, clearly taken aback.

"Oh, yes. I knew that you were not a stupid man, and that some year you would realize the truth about my little rituals."

"You mean you have—uh—done this before?"

Miss Witherspoon nodded.

"You knew that you'd be found out and yet you kept right on doing it?"

"Of course I kept right on. You would not easily give up your work, your mission in life, would you, Sheriff?" The old lady paused, although the question was obviously rhetorical. "Of course you wouldn't," she answered herself, "and neither would I. We are in the same work, after all, and neither of us could honorably give it up. The world needs our efforts."

The Sheriff, beginning to understand, asked gently, "And what do you think our work is?"

"Why, ridding the town of evildoers, of course," she stated matter-of-factly. "There are far too many for you to dispose of alone, and not all of them come to your attention. That is why, each year, I select a single candidate for extinction."

The Sheriff had no ready response.

Miss Witherspoon brushed the cat from her lap and rose to her feet. "Excuse me. I shall make us some tea."

In a few minutes she returned from the kitchen with a tray full of the items necessary for serving tea. In her absence the Sheriff had decided what his next question would be. "How did you choose your—er—your candidates for extinction?" he asked.

"I simply took note of which people were breaking which one of the ten commandments and disposed of them, in order. This year I had reached the seventh commandment." She looked down at her hands, folded in her lap, somewhat embarrassed to mention the word aloud, to a man. "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

"Do you mean to say," the Sheriff asked, "that you have—uh—eliminated six other people?"

"Yes, I have." Miss Witherspoon's pride was apparent. "Beginning with the person who most blatantly broke the first commandment—John Leger, the money worshiping bank president—and going right down the list to Number Seven."

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She paused a moment as if waiting for praise. None was forthcoming and so she continued, "My greatest difficulty came last year—finding a candidate for Number Six. You yourself do a fairly efficient job at apprehending those few who actually kill." She was now taking the tone of one professional speaking to another. "But finally I succeeded. You see, it doesn't specify *what* not to kill, and it was common knowledge that Edna Fairbanks put out poisoned meat for the cats to eat."

"So that was it!" the Sheriff exclaimed, relieved to have that year-old puzzle solved. And then he asked, "But what about you, Miss Witherspoon? Haven't you been breaking Number Six yourself?"

"No, not really," the old lady answered, her eyes twinkling with the pleasure of finally being able to reveal her cleverness to someone. "I've thought that through most carefully. I don't actually kill anyone. I simply put within their reach the instrument of death. There's no commandment against doing that."

The old woman is even nuttier than I realized, the Sheriff thought. Aloud he said, "But you made fairly certain they would use that instrument, didn't you? It was that note in Mrs. Laurel's May basket that put me wise to you."

"It's true that my notes encouraged those people to use my herbs; but I succeeded only because the messages which I gave them appealed to the worst in the persons who received them—to the very sinfulness for which they were being punished."

"Well, now," the Sheriff said, with grudging admiration. "You've done a thorough job. But even so, of course, we can't let you go free."

"Oh, I quite understand that," Miss Witherspoon said cheerfully. "You have your job to do."

The Sheriff sighed with relief. This was going to be easier than he had feared. He said, "Take a little time to get your things in order and I'll come back later with a warrant."

"That will be quite satisfactory," Miss Witherspoon said as she showed him to the door.

After all, the ground-up poison parsley with which she had laced his tea would be quick and effective. It was as deadly as hemlock—Socrates' drink.

She did regret that this one death was out of season. But, after all, it was an emergency. Also, she had not told the Sheriff that she had been forced to skip one commandment in the list. So far as she knew, the Sheriff had not stolen anything. But he certainly was very close to breaking Number Nine, for what was he planning to do but to bear false witness against her? She had perceived that immediately.

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John Carlo was arrogant, audacious, clever. But his most dangerous characteristic—to others around him—was his ruthlessness. It was not easy to stop his driving ambition, especially when Carlo was willing to use any means, no matter how despicable, was ready to stop at nothing, to achieve his goal.

Cynthia's father had good reason to be deathly afraid . . .

SHOWDOWN

by RICHARD O. LEWIS

THE SUNDAY AFTERNOON POKER game in my den broke up promptly at six o'clock as usual, and the boys got up from around the felt-topped table to make their departure.

I was the big loser. But there was a reason—my thoughts had kept straying away from the business at hand.

Doc Caldwell and Bob Martin, the architect, had just about broken even.

Sheriff Ed Wintz was the big winner—about $10, I guessed. I tapped him on the shoulder just as he was about to go out the door with the others. "Could you spare a minute or two, Ed?"

He turned and grinned. "Sure. I suppose you've figured out some way to get your money back."

"I'll get it back next time," I promised. "And more."

We sat down at our places at the table and I began fiddling with the cards, hardly knowing how to begin.

"I have a problem," I said finally.

"Don't we all!"

Sheriff Ed Wintz was a heavy man with a pink face topped by a stubble of red hair that was rapidly losing its color. Like the others in the group he lived only a block or two away. I had known him for a long time and felt that he would keep anything I told him in absolute confidence.

"I have a salesman," I said. "Or, rather, I *had* a salesman. He is now sales manager of the firm."

"And I suppose you noticed a shortage?" Ed asked.

"No. Nothing like that. I think he is far too clever than to risk any petty thievery that might be traced directly to him. I am cer-

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tain he's after far bigger game."

Ed cocked his head. "Well, if I can be of any help—"

"That's just it," I said. "I don't see how you *can* help. Or how *anyone* can help. But I thought you should know about this, just in case something—something should *happen.*"

"You're beginning to sound mighty serious."

"I *am* serious," I said.

I dealt out two hands, face up, and studied them absently, trying to get things straight in my mind.

"I'm listening," Ed said.

I picked up the cards and returned them to the deck.

"His name is John Carlo. One of my salesmen brought him into my office about eighteen months ago and introduced him to me and he asked me for a job. I needed a salesman at that time, so I hired him. He's a dark handsome man in a masculine way, in his late twenties, aggressive, ambitious, and—and I am beginning to believe, absolutely ruthless.

"He immediately began to sell furniture like it had never been sold before. Within six months his sales topped those of my best men, and their sales began to slump proportionately. The men began to shun him—act as if they hated him—and I couldn't be sure why. Whenever I tried to question any of them they'd back off and change the subject."

"Maybe they were just jealous of him," suggested Wintz. "You know, an upstart rushing in and grabbing the ball—"

"That's what I thought—at first. Then, about eight months ago, my sales manager, Bill Reed, suddenly decided to retire. That left me in need of a quick replacement. Fred Baylor seemed the logical man for the spot. He has a good record, a wife, three kids, and seniority. But when I approached him concerning the promotion, he hesitated for a minute, then declined. He said he didn't want to take on the extra responsibility."

Wintz shrugged. "Well, maybe he didn't."

"That was the day after a front wheel had fallen off Fred Baylor's car while he was driving to work! The car sustained some damages, and Fred got shook up a bit. That was all. But if the same thing, or something similar, should happen on a Sunday afternoon—say, while Fred was taking his wife and children for a spin through the countryside—"

Ed's pink forehead began to wrinkle. "You think this Carlo fellow threatened Fred? Loosened his wheel as a warning?"

"I didn't think so at the time," I said. "The accident could have happened to anyone. After a few more of my men turned down the promotion—for one reason or another—I finally gave the job

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of sales manager to Carlo."

"But there's no real evidence that Carlo had anything to do with the—the accident?"

"None whatever," I said. "But listen to this. Two days ago—that was Friday—Carlo came into my office, stood before my desk, fastened his eyes on me, and demanded an equal partnership in the firm."

"What?" Sheriff Wintz nearly leaped out of his chair.

"Right," I said.

"Why—why, but that's preposterous!" Ed's pink face had gone florid. "The Jensen Furniture Company was founded by your great-grandfather, has been handed down from father to son for generations! Why would that young punk think he's got any right to—did he threaten you in any way?"

"Not in the least. He simply made a flat statement. He said he'd give me a few days to think it over, then turned and walked out."

"I can't believe it!" said Wintz. "You fired him, of course?"

I shook my head. "No, I didn't. If he really intends to strike out at me some way, firing him wouldn't stop it. Might even make it worse. Anyway, coming out of the clear sky that way, the thing has left me completely bewildered. That's why I wanted to talk with you about it. I wanted you to know the whole story, just in case—well, just in case something happens."

"Then you really think he might try something, try to force you—"

"I don't know," I said. "Right now, I don't see how he could exert any pressure on me. But if ever in my life I looked into the eyes of a man who would let nothing stand in his way, I looked into them Friday morning when John Carlo stood in front of my desk."

Sheriff Wintz sat in silence, shaking his head thoughtfully from side to side. "I guess you're right about one thing," he said finally. "There isn't anything *I* can do about the situation. Or anyone else. Unless, of course, he should, in some way, overplay his hand."

"And that isn't likely," I said. "I think Carlo is a very clever young man. He'd make a mighty good poker player."

I showed Wintz to the door a few minutes later and watched him walk down the street toward his house. He was still shaking his head.

It was Tuesday morning when my secretary announced on my desk intercom that Mr. Carlo wished to see me.

"Send him right in," I said and clicked off the machine.

In the top drawer of my desk, waiting, was the small tape recorder I frequently used for dictation. I opened the drawer, flicked on a

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switch, and closed the drawer halfway.

Carlo came in and strode to my desk, his dark eyes flashing their usual arrogance.

"I hope you've reached a favorable decision concerning the business proposition I made to you a few days ago," he said, coming directly to the point.

"No," I said. "I haven't. And I see no reason why I should."

He crooked one leg over a corner of my desk and sat there regarding his manicured nails in a supercilious manner. "You being a good father," he said, "I should think you would want your daughter to continue living in the manner to which you have accustomed her."

I felt my face go white. Up until this moment I had not the remotest idea from which direction he might launch an attack. Now it was suddenly obvious.

"Leave Cynthia out of this," I said.

He blew breath on his fingernails and rubbed them gently against the front of his coat. "I hardly see how I can," he said. "You see, I intend to marry her."

"You *what!*"

He took his leg from the desk and wheeled to look down at me, an amused smile tugging at his lips. "There's nothing to get upset about," he said. "It happens every day. People fall in love. People get married."

"But she's just a kid—still in college!"

"I know she's in college. That's where I've been spending my weekends. And if you think she's just a kid, you'd better look at her again."

I leaped from my chair, my body trembling, and leaned toward him. It was only by exerting superhuman control that I kept from smashing a white-knuckled fist into his leering mouth.

"You lie!" I shouted. "I—I don't believe a word you say! Cynthia wouldn't—couldn't—fall in love—couldn't marry someone like—" The words were tumbling out in confusion.

"There is one way to find out," he said casually. "Ask her."

He went to the door, opened it, and turned to face me again. "Think it over, *Dad*," he said. "I feel quite certain that you would want Cynthia to marry a well-established man—like one who owns a half interest in a very prosperous concern."

Then he went out and closed the door after him.

I slumped back into my chair, beaten, still trembling. He had found my one vulnerable spot—Cynthia. Since the death of her mother five years ago, she had been my entire world, the one person I lived for. And now, to see her about to fall into the slimy tentacles of this—this monster.

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The tape recorder was still running. I shut it off and slammed the drawer shut. There was nothing there that could be used against him. He had merely stated that he and Cynthia were in love, were intending to get married, and that, under the circumstances a partnership in the firm would be a practical arrangement. Nothing in the least incriminating.

An hour later, still in a bewildered, trance-like state, I had begun the 200-mile journey to Fairview College. It seemed that I was sitting motionless in the car, alone with my troubled thoughts, while the landscape swam by.

No matter how I approached the problem I could arrive at no logical solution. If by any stretch of the imagination I should make him a full partner and he should marry Cynthia, he would automatically become sole owner of the firm—*if anything should happen to me.* On the other hand, if I fired him, he would probably marry Cynthia anyway. In that case, he would also become sole owner of the firm—*if anything should happen to me.* Perspiration trickled down from my armpits as I remembered the deadly look I had seen in his eyes.

And then an even greater fear assailed me. What if he *did* marry Cynthia and something *did* happen to me, what about Cynthia's future? Eventually, *would something also happen to her?* If so, he would then have complete control of the firm with no strings attached and could sail on to even greater heights.

But what could I do? Immediately disinherit Cynthia, my only child? After generations of struggle, let the firm slip entirely away from the family? No! Unthinkable!

But, perhaps, Cynthia was not really in love with him. That was my only hope. Or, even if she were in love with him, maybe I could get her to see the true picture . . .

I met Cynthia just as she was returning to her dormitory after her last afternoon class. She was glad to see me, but somewhat surprised. "Why, Father," she cried, hopping into the front seat beside me. "What on earth brings you here?"

Miniskirted, eye-shadowed, elfin of face, with blonde hair streaming down to her shoulders, she was a beautiful young woman—although a bit too much on the modern side to please my conservative tastes.

"You don't look so good," she said, peering earnestly into my face. "Is—is something wrong?"

I gave a brief nod, set the car into motion, and drove in silence to a small park near the campus. I stopped in the shade of a large elm and turned to face her.

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"You know John Carlo?" I blurted out, not knowing how else to begin.

"Why, yes," she said. "I've known Johnny for several months now. Has—has anything happened to him?"

I shook my head. "You intend to marry him?"

"Why, Father!" she said, her blue eyes going suddenly round. "That was supposed to be a secret! We were going to surprise you!" She laughed. "But I suppose he couldn't wait. He had to run and tell you right away."

"Yes," I said, distress making the word sound husky.

"You don't seem very happy about it," she said.

"I'm not. In fact, I came here this afternoon to ask you not to marry him."

"But, why?" Her eyes had gone round again. "You must like him yourself or you wouldn't have made him your sales manager."

"Cynthia," I said. "He is not what he seems, not what you think. He's nothing more than a—a—"

The words stopped suddenly as I realized that I had not one bit of tangible evidence against the man. What could I tell her? That the salesmen shunned Carlo? That a front wheel had dropped off Fred Baylor's car, and that Fred had backed off from the promotion to sales manager? That Carlo had demanded a half interest in the firm? That I had seen what I thought was a look of pure evil in his eyes?

"He has asked for a full partnership in the company," I said.

"See!" cried Cynthia. "I told you he was ambitious! And what could be more reasonable than wanting to be a part of the firm? You do want to keep it in the family, don't you?"

Suddenly she put an arm around me and nestled her head against my shoulder. "Poor Father," she said soothingly. "Had I been a son, you would have had no problem. But you are just like most of the other fathers. They think no man is good enough for their little daughters. It's hard for them to realize their little daughters have an uncontrollable habit of growing up to be young women who want a home, love, and a life of their own."

During the long trip home that night I finally arrived at the only solution left open to me. I would have to get rid of John Carlo. He was not only a menace to me, but also to society at large. I had no positive proof, but just the same, I felt that the evil was there, lurking, waiting to pounce. I had to save Cynthia from him—somehow. And I had to do it before time ran out.

It was late when I arrived home

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that night, but I went directly to my library. I switched on the lights and sat behind the huge desk-table that occupied the center of the room. I tugged open the spacious bottom drawer, tossed a heavy catalogue on the desk top, and began to rummage deep into the old bills, notebooks, and correspondence that had accumulated through the years. I soon found the object of my search—a .32 caliber automatic pistol.

The gun had belonged to my father. During my youth he had taught me how to use it and I had become fairly proficient as a marksman. It had now lain in the drawer, almost forgotten, for more than twenty years. I doubt if it had ever been registered.

I pulled back the slide. The barrel was empty. I hefted the weapon in my hand, thoughtfully, for a minute or two, then kicked the drawer shut. I had no definite plan in mind as I carried the gun with me into my bedroom.

I didn't go to the office Wednesday morning. Instead, I purchased a box of fresh ammunition and drove out of town to a secluded wooded area. I loaded the gun, held it at arm's length, and fired at the bole of a tree. The slug hit almost dead-center. Then I fired the remainder of the clip. In spite of its long period of inactivity the gun was in perfect mechanical condition, and I had not lost all my old skill.

On Thursday morning I had my secretary summon Carlo to my office. He breezed in and approached my desk, his dark brows raised expectantly.

"I had a long talk with Cynthia two days ago," I said.

"And?"

"She seems to be very much in love with you." I let my eyes fall to a letter opener on my desk and began toying with it. "In fact, she seems very intent on marrying you." I glanced up in time to catch a fleeting smile just as it left his lips.

"You know," I continued, "that at first I was very much opposed to giving you a partnership. But Cynthia seemed to think that it would be a good idea. Keep the firm in the family, she said."

"I think it would work out very nicely, sir, for all concerned." He was being overly polite now.

I got up from the desk, strode to a window, and stood looking down at the traffic below. I could sense that he was gloating behind my back, congratulating himself on his cleverness.

"I find that I have gotten very tired," I said, after a short silence. "I feel very much in need of a vacation. A long rest. I plan to leave early Monday morning. I don't know how long I'll be away."

Carlo didn't say anything. He

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was no doubt wondering how long I'd be gone, how long it would be before he could get his hot, eager hands on the partnership papers. I let him wonder for a while, then turned around to face him again.

"I'd like to get everything cleared up before I leave," I told him. "I think it is possible for my lawyers to have all the necessary papers in order by this weekend. If you could call at my home Sunday afternoon—say, at three o'clock—the papers should be ready for our signatures."

His eyes failed to hide the glint of triumph that had leaped into them. "That will be fine, sir," he said. "And I hope your vacation proves to be enjoyable."

The Sunday afternoon poker game was in full swing in my den. It was a quiet game, as poker games generally are, filled with periods of concentration. It was nearly three o'clock, and I was beginning to feel the tension inside me mount steadily higher.

Doc tossed a quarter into the pot to open. Bob Martin flicked his cards to the table in disgust. Ed Wintz called Doc's quarter. And then the front doorbell chimed.

I discarded my hand and got to my feet. "Excuse me, gentlemen," I said, struggling to keep my voice even. "I have a short business engagement. I should be back in less than half an hour. Carry on."

I left the den, closing the door behind me, and walked down the hall past the open door of the library. I let Carlo in at the front door.

"Follow me," I said, and led the way down the hall into the library. I went directly to the desk in the center of the room.

Carlo hesitated a moment and glanced quickly around the room. Obviously he had been expecting a lawyer to be present. Then he came over, still hesitant, and stood across the desk from me.

"I have everything ready for you," I said, pulling open the top drawer of the desk. "Everything ready and waiting." My hand came out of the drawer—holding the pistol firmly.

Pale rings of fear appeared suddenly around his dark eyes and I aimed the gun squarely at his heart and flicked the safety catch with my thumb.

"I am going to get rid of you, Carlo," I said evenly. "Right here and now."

The circles of fear grew whiter, and his mouth began to sag. "But you—you *can't!*"

It was good to see the arrogance go out of him, good to watch him slink back and cringe.

"There is no reason in the world why I can't," I said, taking a step around the side of the desk toward him. "My

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housekeeper has Sunday afternoon off, and the stone walls of this house are thick enough to muffle the sound of a shot. I have already selected a safe place for your body."

I started to take another step toward him, my hand tightening on the gun. "And now—"

It was then that my right foot got caught under the desk and against one of its legs, anchoring me suddenly, and throwing my body forward, off balance.

His hand shot out with lightning speed and grabbed the gun. In a flash he had it leveled at me.

"And so, old man," he breathed. "You thought you would trick me. And now the tables are turned." His arrogance was rapidly returning. "I hadn't intended to get rid of you until after I had married Cynthia. But you have forced me to do it now. Naturally I'll make it look like a simple case of suicide."

If I had previously lacked proof of his intentions I certainly didn't want for it now.

"Then I'll marry your grieving little Cynthia—"

"Why, you—you—"

I suddenly clutched up the heavy catalogue from the desk and made for him.

He stumbled back a step, panic leaping into his eyes as I raised my cumbersome weapon to swing at him.

Then the gun jerked, and the room was filled with its noise.

I spun sideways and fell to the floor, clutching the thick catalogue to my chest. I lay with eyes closed, waiting.

I heard him step quietly toward me and sensed that he was holding the gun pointed directly at my head, just in case.

I moved a leg. The answering, hollow click of the gun was scarcely audible above the noise of bodies tumbling in through the door.

I opened my eyes just in time to see Sheriff Wintz make a flying tackle that sent him and Carlo clattering and skidding across the polished floor.

Doc Caldwell was bending over me, his hand on my chest. "Are—are you all right?"

I nodded my head weakly and permitted him to help me to my feet.

Bob Martin took the catalogue from my hands and glanced at it. There was a neat round hole in its cover. He took the catalogue to the desk and fluttered its pages open. A .32 slug clattered out. "Gee!" he said, staring at me. "If it hadn't been for this catalogue, he'd have killed you for sure!"

"It certainly seems so," I said.

I didn't know that Sheriff Wintz was in the habit of carrying handcuffs with him. Anyway, he had Carlo's wrists snubbed

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securely when he shoved the man forward. "I am placing you under arrest," he said officiously, "for attempted murder!" Then he wiped away the sweat that had suddenly appeared on his pink forehead.

Carlo seemed to be confused. He was staring at me, bewildered, his mouth hanging. Even as Ed Wintz started to push him toward the door Carlo continued to stare at me.

I knew what was troubling him. He couldn't figure out how—at point-blank range—he had missed me and hit the catalogue!

Well, where he was going, he would have plenty of time to think about it. If he was as clever as he thought he was, he would figure out that the slug had been fired into the catalogue earlier in the day and that the lone bullet in the gun had been a blank.

Pretending I was still in shock, I leaned over the desk and put one hand to my face—to hide the smile that I could not stop from spreading there.

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a *NEW* Miss Phipps story by

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

Remember Phyllis Bentley's story titled "Miss Phipps and the Nest of Illusion," in the August 1969 issue of EQMM? You'll recall that in the editorial preface your Editors innocently confessed to not knowing the meaning of the word "dogsbodies." Well! You would not believe how many readers wrote in to enlighten us, some refusing to believe that EQ could be so ignorant (thank you, but, alas, our ignorance was genuine).

One reader of EQMM who answered the unintentioned challenge was the creator of Miss Phipps herself. Here is her definition of dogsbodies: "Just for your amusement," Phyllis Bentley wrote, "let me elucidate the term 'dogsbodies.' A dogsbody is, in any sphere, a trusted reliable subordinate who performs all the tiresome, essential, minor, non-prestige-producing tasks. He (or often she) checks railway timetables, gets rid of pesters, lays on coffee, tracks down missing persons who have wandered off, and in general eases the path of those whose work is more important to the task in hand. The slang term 'dogsbody' is usually employed by dogsbodies themselves, in humorous self-depreciation."

At the end of her letter Phyllis Bentley had news of her spinster-novelist-sleuth: "Dear Miss Phipps is stranded at the moment on a Shetland island. A lovely scene for murder . . ."

Here is Miss Phipps's adventure on a remote, lonely, Viking-haunted, storm-tossed Shetland isle—and a strange adventure it is—with only a hint of dogsbodies . . . (No, we are not questioning any words in the new story this time, thank you!)

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MISS PHIPPS EXERCISES HER METIER

by PHYLLIS BENTLEY

ALL OF A SUDDEN Miss Marian Phipps felt lonely.

This was rather strange, for up to that moment she had been enjoying the peace of this remote Shetland isle. After the repeated discussions, the divergent human wishes, and the frequent telephonings of the morning, the present silence—the sheer absence of human voices—was restful in the extreme. The island was small, but large enough to offer considerable grassy slopes, and over the steepest of these her four companions on the excursion were now climbing rapidly.

The dark cliffs rose to fine and jagged heights; the northern sea was a rich dark blue with white surf fringes; the sun shone; the sea birds—gulls, gannets, oyster-catchers, shags, terns, puffins, what-have-you (Miss Phipps was not too well up in birds)—clamored a good deal, to be sure, as they swooped about the sky; but their various modes of flight were beautiful to watch, and their resonant tones were a pleasant change from the motor horns and airplane engines which formed her usual sound track.

The rest of the party had wanted to see the remains of the old Viking settlement for which they had indeed come to the island, but these lay on the far side of the steep hill. Miss Phipps, surveying its gradient, and perhaps, in spite of her real affection for them, a little tired of Inspector Tarrant and his wife after a fortnight's holiday together—and certainly tired of Professor Morison and *his* wife after a mere few hours—decided to remain idly in the vicinity of the tiny harbor and landing stage. A neighboring bay, gained by climbing a much slighter slope, was as far as Miss Phipps was prepared to walk.

If she felt a little less than her usual warmth toward the Tarrants this afternoon it was not, she admitted at once, their fault but just part of the usual exasperation of things in general, which so often refused to fit, to go right. Today was the last one of their stay in Shetland, and though they had seen several fine Viking remains, everyone at their hotel in the main port had assured them that those on Fersa were

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the finest, grimmest, most complete in existence. But to reach Fersa one had to proceed to a village on the mainland coast and there rent a boat. "Just telephone the village post office," urged their hotel acquaintances. "They keep a motor vessel for hire."

They telephoned. In fact, they seemed to spend the whole morning at the telephone. Sometimes Inspector Tarrant telephoned, sometimes his wife Mary did, sometimes Miss Phipps. All without result. At first a young man's voice had replied, saying crossly that the sea was too high, and besides, he hadn't the time. Then the wind calmed a little, so they telephoned again. This time a young woman's voice replied. Her voice had sobs in it, and cried out that she couldn't "fash" with them now.

After an hour's wait they telephoned again—and then again. The receiver was lifted and replaced, only a kind of moan being heard in the brief interim. Miss Phipps urged the Tarrants to give up Fersa and decide on some other excursion. Although disappointed as to Vikings, the Tarrants would probably have accepted her advice if it had not been for the Morisons, who now appeared to be seized by Fersa and telephone.

Professor Morison was one of those long, concave, balding academics devoted to abstruse subjects; he had a sallow complexion and sad brown eyes—the type whom Miss Phipps respected but regarded as supremely dreary. His wife, short, plump, fair-haired, bossy, appeared soft-hearted, but in defense of her husband she took on the consistency of marble. When the Tarrant party left the hotel to accompany some fellow guests to the ship about to leave the port harbor for Scotland, Mrs. Morison was again at the telephone in the hall.

"Her husband's away—her husband's out with the boat," she reported over her shoulder to the Professor. When the Tarrant party returned for lunch she was still telephoning.

Meanwhile, Miss Phipps had had a poignant experience. Indeed it was to the poignancy of this experience that she attributed her present sudden attack of loneliness; the usual well-adjusted balance of her feelings had been upset, leaving her open to alarms. (For was she, in fact, feeling "lonely" now, or was she, in reality, for some inexplicable cause merely feeling nervous? She was uncertain.)

The poignant experience was simply the sight of a face peering out from the lower deck of the ship bound for Scotland. A young man's face, dark and handsome, but fixed with such a look of agony that Miss Phipps hoped

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never to see the like again. As Miss Phipps was a novelist, suitable explanations of other people's feelings were naturally apt to rush into her mind.

"Poor lad!" she thought with genuine pity. "Going away from home for the first time, I expect. The heart beholds the islands. A difficult place to leave. Mountains and sea. Poor boy."

On entering the lobby of the hotel she found Mrs. Morison again at the end of the telephone cord, and addressing her husband.

"She says her father-in-law will take us," she cried in triumph. With a sudden change of tone she added, "It'll cost enough."

"Er-hrrumph," said Professor Morison, concaving (Miss Phipps thought) almost more than before.

"Shall we go, James?" pressed Mrs. Morison.

"Er-hrrumph."

"Would you allow our party of three to join you?" said Miss Phipps, springing cheerfully into the breach. "That would lessen the—"

"Er-hrrumph!" said Professor Morison, straightening a little, hopefully.

Mrs. Morison looked eager but still doubtful.

"We have a hired car at our disposal," Miss Phipps added as bait.

Mrs. Morison beamed

"A happy suggestion," she said. "I'm *sure* my husband will approve."

While she clinched the arrangement on the telephone, Miss Phipps flew off to tell the Tarrants of her achievement. It was not well received.

"Fancy spending an afternoon with that old stick!" growled the Inspector.

"Er-hrrumph!" said Mary peevishly.

"Very well, tell them you've changed your mind and don't want to go," said Miss Phipps, vexed.

"Of course we'll go," said Inspector Tarrant with decision.

"Er-hrrumph," said Mary in a kinder tone.

After lunch they drove down to the village, which was almost too tiny to be called a village, consisting chiefly of a post office, above which a home-painted board announced MACKAY. Near a tiny stone landing stage, just across the road from this building, tossed a small boat with an outboard motor, the boat attached to a red buoy. It tossed a good deal; looking out to sea Miss Phipps observed with interest that the waves were also tossing a good deal and were topped by quite a few whitecaps.

Professor Morison, carrying a pair of binoculars, a camera, and a notebook, with two textbooks protruding from his pockets, walked to the end of the little

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jetty and began to examine such birds as flew into view. Bill Tarrant, looking a little more cheerful, followed him, and Mrs. Morison trotted after them on her fat little ankles. Mary and Miss Phipps entered the post office and began to choose picture postcards. Mary, hearing the approach of a distant car, tapped sharply with a coin on the counter.

A most beautiful creature entered. A young woman, not yet 20, Miss Phipps thought; of dazzlingly smooth and unblemished complexion, with pale golden hair twined and piled about her head in thick lustrous swaths. She wore a thin white dress, so short that if another inch were subtracted it would almost be a belt, and so tightly modeled as to show every line of her lovely body except an inch or two hinted at by a few tiny scraps of lace.

She turned her head and Miss Phipps started; her beauty was marred by a heavy bruise on one temple, imperfectly concealed by a good deal of crude makeup, and her large pale blue eyes were red from crying. A wedding ring, and an engagement ring with a single no doubt much-prized pearl, decked the hand with which she pointed out, competently enough, the various categories of postcards and their prices. Her accent had none of the island lilt that Miss Phipps liked so much, and it seemed tinged with Cockney.

"What's come into ye, Zelda?" boomed an angry voice.

The post office door was thrust open vehemently, sounding its little bell, and in strode a solid grizzled figure wearing one of the patterned knit garments native to the island.

"Hae ye no sense, woman? Why can't Eric take the boat across? Dragging me all this way from ma sheep."

"Eric isn't here, Mr. Mackay," said Zelda timidly.

"Whaur's Magnus then?"

"He left."

"Did they go off together, then? Whaur did they go?"

"I don't know," moaned Zelda, almost weeping.

"Women!" exclaimed Mackay. "Sons!"

"I thought you wouldn't want to miss the chance of a boatload of passengers."

"How many are ye, then?" barked Mackay, fixing Miss Phipps with an angry glare.

"Five."

"It'll cost ye two pun ten."

"Very well," said Miss Phipps shortly. "You'll give us enough time on the island to visit the broch?"

Mackay gave a prolonged growl in which might be distinguished the vowels composing an assenting "aye" or "yaas."

"Ye may nae like the sea," he said with what struck Miss Phipps as rather sinister enjoy-

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ment. "It's a wee high. Come awa' wi' ye, then."

As they followed Mackay senior out of the post office and down the little stone pier, Mary and Miss Phipps exchanged glances indicating their unfavorable impressions of the dour boatman. Mary's raised eyebrows brought also a familiar accusation against Miss Phipps.

"I'm irritated by the way you find *a story* in everything," Mary had said not once but several times to Miss Phipps. "It seems an insult to reality."

But Miss Phipps could not help it—it was by now an inveterate habit, and usually she replied cheerfully to these accusations; and this time, as Mary suspected, Miss Phipps had been swept irresistibly into her dearly loved profession. She had begun her imaginings the moment she set eyes on Zelda and the bruise on the girl's temple. The lad with the agonized face was Zelda's husband; they had quarreled; he had struck her, then in shame and fury had left the island. And now this fierce old Mackay had come to confirm her imaginings.

Oh, yes, reflected Miss Phipps, surveying the strong aquiline features, the solid body and crisp graying hair, his older face is strongly akin to the face of the anguished lad on the ship; Zelda had said on the telephone that her father-in-law would ferry the party across to Fersa; the anguished lad is therefore this man's son and this girl's husband.

"Why will people make each other so unhappy?" murmured Miss Phipps. Eric, a good Norse name. As for Magnus, she could not fit him in; perhaps only a minor character in her burgeoning plot.

The Tarrants and Mrs. Morison stood the rough sea well; Miss Phipps enjoyed it, tossing her white curls to the breeze; the Professor turned a curious pea-green and was watched anxiously by his wife, but he yielded no further to queasiness. They landed on the island in a tiny bay, arranged a time for re-embarkation, and then the two married couples strode vigorously up the long green slope. Mr. Mackay vanished round a cliff in his chugging boat, and Miss Phipps wandered about.

It was then that Miss Phipps began to feel lonely. After all, she was apparently left by herself on a small island in the far North Sea, surrounded by a far from calm ocean. Nothing human was visible. The remains of an old cottage—empty windows, broken chimney, vacant doorway—served only to make the absence of life more obvious. The birds soared by uncaring—almost, one might think, contemptuous. Even a sheep's company would have been acceptable. But there was no sheep.

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She could no longer hear the chugging of Mr. Mackay's engine. Suppose they had all gone off and left her! It was an uneasy thought. Yes, she did feel uneasy. "I'll go back to the landing stage," thought Miss Phipps. She turned; and bobbing in the waters of the bay beneath her feet she saw a gray head.

"It's a seal!" exclaimed Miss Phipps, delighted. For though on Shetland they had seen the towering brochs (like huge buckets turned upside down), eider ducks, underground funeral chambers, Vikings' descendants (at a gala) agreeably rigged out as Vikings, Shetland ponies with correct shortage of height and length of mane and tail, sheep with half their fleece hanging off their backs, jumpers of many patterns knitted from this silky wool, lochs, mountains, peat hags, seas in every mood, fishing fleets—indeed, almost everything they had expected and hoped to see in Shetland—their view of seals had been singularly scanty. To return to England without having seen some of these massive northern sea mammals would, Miss Phipps believed, diminish their prestige and credibility as Shetland tourists.

"A seal!" she repeated with delight. "I wonder if it lives in the rocks of this bay? Where do seals have their lairs, if any?"

Scanning the rocks which edged the little bay, all thought was suddenly struck from her mind. For beside a low seaweed-covered ledge of rock lay Mr. Mackay's boat, its painter wound round a protruding buttress, and on the ledge knelt Mr. Mackay himself, and he was actually—yes, actually—wringing his hands and bowing back and forth as if in uncontrollable sorrow.

Miss Phipps stared—at first amazed, then in horror. For what was it, lying amid the seaweed, urgently lapped by long waves, over which Mr. Mackay showed so much grief? He raised his face to the sky; tears coursed down his leathery cheeks. Wasn't the object over which he grieved the outstretched corpse of a young man in fisherman's jersey, a young man with dark curly hair, the image of the young man with the anguished face on the boat, and sufficiently like Mackay senior to confirm the relationship?

"Brothers!" she exclaimed. "It must be Magnus!"

Yes, now the story was complete—in Miss Phipps's bubbling mind. The dead boy was the younger brother; he had been paying attention to the older son's beautiful wife; the older son had caught him at it, taken him off in the boat to Fersa, tipped his body over a cliff, expecting the tides to carry off the corpse; but a hand or foot had caught in a niche of the rock and the body

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still lay there awaiting discovery.

But heavens, what was old Mackay doing now? He pulled at a foot, released it, then heaving the body to its side, pushed it into the waters of the bay. It rolled, paused, drifted, was sucked below a nose of rock, was freed by a stronger wave, then edged its way slowly toward the open sea.

Mackay looked up; Miss Phipps quickly hid behind a rock. A pebble shot from beneath her foot. She hoped he had not heard it or seen her; but she could not feel comfortably sure, for he stood still and gazed round the bay, even shading his eyes with his hand to give himself clearer vision.

There were only two possible courses of action, thought Miss Phipps: go down and confront him, or slip away unseen. With immense relief she perceived that the cliffs were too precipitous here for an elderly lady to descend with reasonable safety, not to mention ease. For a moment which seemed an hour, Mackay gazed and Miss Phipps crouched, peering sideways round her concealing rock.

Then at last the old man gave up his search, stepped down into his boat, released the painter and chugged away.

The moment he was out of sight beyond the cliff Miss Phipps flew. She climbed up the rocks behind her with no care for knees or hands, rushed up the green slope, ran down the rough path, and was sitting on a grassy knoll with her hands clasped round her knees, breathing hard but gazing serenely out to sea when Mackay in his boat came round the nose of the cliff and approached the rocks. Miss Phipps gave him a friendly wave.

"Have ye seen all the isle ye fancy?"

Miss Phipps found this inquiry a trifle sinister. Was he trying to discover if she had visited the bay which held the body?

"Enough," she replied in an off-hand but, she hoped, reassuring tone.

Mackay gave one of those northern snorts whose meaning can only be discovered by its context. He climbed out of his boat, tied it up to the iron ring provided for the purpose, and approached her.

He suspects me; I must admit, reflected Miss Phipps, that I'm afraid.

She looked with longing at the massive hillside beyond which her companions were presumably still engrossed in Viking remains.

"Wad it please ye to come round in the boat wi' me to fetch the others awa'?" suggested Mackay, obviously noting the direction of her glance.

Not on your life, thought Miss Phipps. There was a gleam in

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his eye which she found most disturbing. If she went out alone in the boat with him, she was sure there would be another body lost off this island. But how to put him off?

"Is there a landing stage there?" she said aloud, with an obvious note of doubt.

"There's a slab of concrete amid the rocks."

"We should probably miss them, wouldn't we?"

"We could always turn back."

"We could," began Miss Phipps, "but is it wise to take the risk of missing them?"

Mackay gave another island snort and extended his hand. Miss Phipps—unhappily, but not able to think of further delaying tactics—took it and rose. She gave a last despairing glance toward the hillside, and there, oh, joy, came her rescuers. Just over the brow appeared Professor Morison and Inspector Tarrant.

"There they are!" she exclaimed gratefully. "Bill! Professor Morison! Cooee!"

Deep in conversation they took not the slightest notice of her appeals. She waved, she cried out, she almost screamed, but Inspector Tarrant remained bent toward the Professor, who continually talked and pointed. Obviously he was deep in his favorite subject of ornithology.

"These birdwatchers," said Miss Phipps with irritation.

"Aweel, you can get in the boat and sit," urged Mackay.

"I'll wait for them here," said Miss Phipps, reminding herself how many a slip there could be between boat and rock. That iron ring, too—a nasty thing to strike one's head against. She withdrew her hand. "I'll wait for them here," she repeated.

"As ye please," said Mackay.

He withdrew to his boat, but with true Norse economy did not start the engine.

At long, long last the Viking-fans reached Miss Phipps. Professor Morison, his sad eyes beaming, was now talking about the varying coloration of puffins.

"You might have acknowledged my greetings," snapped Miss Phipps, peevish.

"I'm sorry, but we didn't hear you," said Bill Tarrant mildly.

After a further long wait Mary and Mrs. Morison arrived talking about fashions. They all got into the boat without incident, Miss Phipps taking care to descend with, and sit between, her two female companions.

The sea was rougher than before. Professor Morison's shade of green was now a darkling olive. Waves slapped overboard, and Miss Phipps, normally a lover of stormy seas, began to wish that they were safely ashore—really this tossing gave too many opportunities for an "accident." Mackay was capable of drowning the

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whole lot of them to save his son, she reflected.

"Hae ye bairns?" inquired Mackay suddenly.

It seemed the Morisons had none; the Tarrants admitted their two.

"And you?" said Bill politely.

"I have two sons, Eric and Magnus," said Mackay, glancing at Miss Phipps. "But they're footloose. Shetland's too small for them. They're both intending to be awa' to London."

"What will they do there?" asked Professor Morison. "No mountains, no sea, no birds."

"Zelda will like it. Eric's wife. Her at the post office. She's London-born," said Mackay, with a certain bitterness. "She came to the island on a holiday cruise."

"Oh, look, there's a seal!" cried Mary Tarrant enthusiastically.

Glancing up, Miss Phipps found Mackay's eyes fixed fiercely on her. Of course—there was a seal at the entrance of the murder bay, she thought; if he learns I saw it he'll think I saw other things in that bay too. All this passed through her mind in a flash. As if she had never seen a seal in her life and would not recognize a seal if she saw one, she cried out cheerfully, "Where?"—and conscientiously scanned the horizon.

It was a good lie—accepted, Miss Phipps noted with great relief, where acceptance was most needed.

Two mornings later, with Scottish soil safely beneath their feet and Shetland lying far behind them in the northern waves, Miss Phipps began to argue with her conscience as to whether she should tell Inspector Tarrant of her Fersa adventure. It seemed, on the one hand, her duty as a citizen to do so. But on the other hand, she thought of old broken-hearted Mackay, of that silly lovely Zelda, of the anguished Eric . . .

"They will have enough misery as it is," she murmured, "and it won't do Magnus any good."

After a few moments she smiled. "Besides, I don't *know* anything—I don't *really* know. After all, it was only an exercise of my métier!"

It was one of the rare occasions on which Miss Phipps the professional novelist triumphed over Miss Phipps the amateur criminologist.

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a *NEW* non-series story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

It is always a compliment to an author when he or she writes a non-series story that is as interesting, or even more interesting, than the series. In this new story William Brittain outdoes himself in a tale about a brilliant physicist who is forced by circumstances to take pointless, dead-end, menial jobs, but who remains a man with a life purpose—a deadly life purpose . . .

FALLING OBJECT

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

EDMUND PLUMMER STOOD ON the roof of the Talmadge Building and peered over the parapet. He could see the flat stainless-steel-and-glass side of the building seeming to become smaller as his gaze traveled downward to the street twenty stories below. There were no setbacks, no architectural gewgaws to break the edifice's severe rectangular lines; it was a triumph of modern efficiency, providing the maximum of office space with the minimum of materials.

But Plummer thought he had discovered something unusual about the building. If true it might make necessary a revision of his original set of equations. He raised his bifocal glasses and bent forward to peer once again through the telescope of the surveyors' transit he had set up on the roof. Then he checked the measurement gauges on the instrument and jotted some figures into a notebook in neat precise columns.

There could be no question about it. Instead of rising at a precise right angle from the pavement below, the sides of the Talmadge Building leaned to the south almost three inches—two and seven-eighths inches, to be exact.

Edmund Plummer wished to be exact.

He looked at his watch, startled

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that his time on the roof had passed so quickly. Down below, on the fourteenth floor, men and women would be leaving their offices to go home. Then it would be Plummer's job to sweep and mop and carry away the mountainous pile of wastepaper and other debris created each day in order to keep a few of the wheels in that remarkable machine called American Business running properly.

Plummer neither liked nor disliked his job as a cleaning man. He had felt the same way about his previous job as a dishwasher and the one before that when he went from door to door handing out advertising leaflets for a chain of department stores. They were ways to keep alive, that was all. And even in these menial occupations, sooner or later he would have to quit and move on. Eventually, no matter where he was or what he did, someone would recognize him as the man whom the law had freed but whom everyone knew to be a—

Plummer tried to keep the word out of his mind. But it was impossible. Besides, it was all down in the official government records, which were now probably yellowing and gathering dust in a warehouse somewhere.

He managed to smile to himself, wondering what the secretaries on the fourteenth floor, who were so pleasant and so condescending to him, would think if they ever found out that the odd little man who emptied their ashtrays and dusted their desks and smiled vacantly at them had received his Ph.D. in physics at the age of 23. Would they still giggle and call him "Plumsy" if they became aware that during the fall of 1942 and the spring of '43, at the height of World War II, he had been considered potentially more valuable to the Allies than a squadron of bombers?

And what would their reaction be if they discovered that their genial janitor had once stood in the dock of justice accused of being a traitor?

There was nothing thrilling or sensational about what had happened to Plummer; the whole grubby business had been a tragedy of errors from beginning to end. During October of 1942—at about the time that British bombers were stepping up their incessant pounding of the German industrial cities—Plummer was hard at work on a device of his own invention. It was an improved bombsight.

As any bomber pilot of that time could testify, the most dangerous part of a mission was the "bombing run"—the approach to the target. At that point the plane had to be kept straight and level for a period of approximately 30 seconds, allowing the

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bombardier to adjust his sight, make the correct allowances for speed, direction, and altitude, then release his bombs. During that 30-second period the plane was a sitting duck at the not-so-tender mercies of both the cruelly accurate anti-aircraft batteries on the ground and the best fliers the German Luftwaffe could put into the air. Men who have been through it are willing to swear that the 30 seconds over the target really lasted 30 years.

Plummer's new bombsight was designed to reduce that period of time by a full seven seconds. Seven seconds—the entire R.A.F. would have been willing to sell its collective soul to obtain seven seconds of grace on their flights through the shrapnel-filled hell.

But the device was never to reach the men who so desperately needed it.

Near the end of October 1942 certain "bugs" started cropping up in the new bombsight. On several occasions, problems that had seemed near solution proved to be more complicated than was first supposed, forcing not only Plummer but his entire staff to spend valuable time readjusting their theories to fit cold, hard, unyielding facts.

At about the same time Plummer received a visitor at his small apartment near the Baltimore research center. The visitor gave his name as Norman Gant. He had heard of Plummer's work on the bombsight, and he wondered if he might discuss—no, of course not. The government would be keeping close watch on the progress of such an important device. Still, Gant explained, there were those who were interested in seeing that such an invention did not come into use *too* soon. Perhaps certain problems that Plummer was having might delay final production for a year, maybe longer. Those whom Gant represented would be willing to pay a huge sum for such delay.

Plummer had thrown the man out of the apartment.

But unfortunately he had neglected to report the offer of a bribe. And even more unfortunately the progress on the bombsight came almost to a halt. First, the optical system had to be scrapped; then the unit refused to function reliably at any altitude above 100 feet; and the focusing gauge tended to jam in wet weather. Everything that could possibly go wrong seemed to do so.

And in April of the following year, during a raid on an apartment suspected of harboring German nationals, the man who called himself Gant was picked up by the F.B.I. He was quickly identified as Josef Schissel, a former guard at one of the Vernichtungslager—the Nazi extermination camps. Having spent

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several years in the United States as a youth, Schissel spoke English without an accent, and in addition he was familiar with American slang. The Abwehr, the German Intelligence Bureau, had received word of the device on which Plummer was working, and Schissel had been smuggled into the United States by way of Mexico for the sole purpose of rendering the new bombsight project ineffectual. This Schissel proceeded to do—simply by swearing that the young scientist had indeed accepted money from him to slow down work on the bombsight. Schissel's confession, coupled with the almost total lack of progress on the device itself, was enough to make the authorities gravely suspicious that Plummer had sold out his country.

At the ensuing trial Plummer was pitifully unable to refute the circumstantial evidence against him. Why, it was asked, hadn't he reported his meeting with Schissel immediately? His answer—that he considered the man just another anti-war crackpot—was the object of derisive laughter by the prosecuting attorney. Plummer pointed out that his standard of living hadn't changed a bit since the supposed payoff. The prosecution, however, took the position that a man as intelligent as Plummer would be far too clever to begin spending the money immediately. Secret Swiss bank accounts were hinted at. And yet the government could produce no real evidence of anything more serious than poor judgment. Plummer might even have convinced everyone of his innocence—except for Schissel's testimony.

When the small clean-shaven German was placed on the witness stand he requested and was granted the privilege of making a statement to the court. Everyone present expected him to scream curses at the government which was holding him captive. The judge held his gavel ready to hammer down any such attempt.

Instead, Schissel began by thanking the court as well as his captors for the extreme courtesy they had shown to him, an enemy agent. He commended the judge for his fairness. Under the circumstances, Schissel went on, he was sorry to have placed the judge in such a difficult position. He realized that the judge would find it necessary to declare Plummer innocent because of the value of his brain to the Allies.

"You must find him innocent because the government forces you to do so," Schissel concluded in a low voice. "It is a pity that the law must yield to expediency." Stretching out his hand, Schissel pointed dramatically at Plummer. "Nevertheless, that man is a traitor to his country."

It may have been that Judge

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Randall Barth felt compelled to prove that in his courtroom the law still reigned supreme; perhaps Schissel's humble manner and his obvious willingness to take the entire punishment on his own shoulders evoked some sympathetic vibration in the judicial conscience. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the enemy agent's words had an astounding effect. "That agent really got under Judge Barth's skin," one reporter was overheard to tell another. "The old man's liable to set Schissel free and hang Plummer instead."

In his final summation Judge Barth left no doubt that he considered Plummer to be the lowest form of human scum. He stated that he would personally see to it that the complete testimony of the trial was made available to any prospective employer foolish enough even to consider giving employment to such a person. Nevertheless, on the basis of the evidence alone—

Forcing each word through teeth clenched in anger the judge pronounced the accused Not Guilty. The reporters rushed from the building to file their stories.

In the court of law Plummer was innocent. But public opinion does not operate by rules of evidence. In a world of defense contracts and top-secret information Plummer found himself an outcast. His fiancée returned his ring; there was no note attached. He learned that while a rising young physicist attracts friends as honey attracts bees, a suspected traitor attracts only curses and looks of scorn and disgust. The two years in which he went without work wiped out his small savings. And then began the series of pointless, dead-end, menial jobs. He didn't live; he merely existed from day to day.

Then one morning in 1956 he found a cast-off newspaper on a park bench. He was about to pass it by when his eye was attracted by a small headline containing a familiar name. After 13 years of imprisonment, the article stated, Josef Schissel, a spy for the Nazis during World War II, was to be released.

Schissel would be free. And Plummer resolved to kill him.

There followed for Plummer several years of keeping painstaking records on Schissel's whereabouts. He was returned to Germany. There he was influential in the exposure of three major Nazi war criminals. A general, grateful for Schissel's assistance in rounding up the wanted men, pulled some political strings to obtain a visa to enable the former spy to revisit the United States. The visa was twice renewed. Finally, in 1965, Schissel was granted permission to live permanently in the United States. Three years later he bought a

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small delicatessen only a couple of blocks from the Talmadge Building. Within a few months word of his delicious coffee and generously large slices of rich pastries had been passed to several of the secretaries in the building, and Schissel was commissioned to make daily deliveries for the morning coffee breaks.

It was then that Plummer applied for a job in the Talmadge Building as a janitor. He was hired.

At that time Plummer had no idea which method he would use to kill Schissel. It was enough to have finally located the man who had ruined his life.

During his first day on the job Plummer found out that the coffee-break items were delivered by Schissel himself; the Talmadge Building provided the major part of his income, and he did not trust any of his helpers to make the deliveries properly. But try as he might, for the first week on the job, Plummer could not catch sight of his intended victim. He began to wonder what changes 25 years had made in Schissel's appearance.

During the second week Plummer was sent to the roof of the building to clean away a pile of debris left by some workmen. It was hard work, and when he finally finished, he leaned against the parapet, enjoying the cooling breeze which never reached the sidewalk far below. He saw a panel truck pull up to the curb in the alley next to the building. A man wearing a white apron got out. From where Plummer was standing, the figure was curiously foreshortened. The man, who from that distance resembled a tiny white insect, opened the rear of the truck, took out a small wheeled cart, and began to fill it with coffee urns and trays wrapped in white paper. Then the man wheeled the cart around the corner to the building's front entrance. There the doorman greeted him cordially and even opened the door for him. It was several seconds after the man had entered that Plummer realized who he must be.

Schissel! There below him in the street, the man whose lies had made Plummer's existence a living hell was calmly making his daily delivery. Heart pounding furiously, Plummer raced down the stairs from the roof. He ran to the door of the service elevator and was about to punch the button when he stopped. As he withdrew his hand he smiled grimly.

He knew now how Schissel would die.

A few days later, from his meager savings, Plummer purchased a small but heavy steel strongbox. By going without lunches for several weeks he saved enough money to buy a second-hand surveyors' transit, complete

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with tripod, from the pawnshop around the corner from the shabby room in which he lived. The following Sunday he carried the transit to several points within two blocks of the Talmadge Building. From each of these spots the entire height of the structure was visible, and at each he took readings with his transit.

Then Plummer began his calculations. They were comparatively simple for a man who had once designed a bombsight. The Talmadge Building was 242 feet high. Five feet eight inches—he guessed that to be Schissel's height—would have to be subtracted from that, making the distance 236½ feet. Weight, of course, was not important. It was the mass that counted, barring the negligible effect of the air itself. Wind needed to be taken into consideration, so he would choose a calm day. A rate of acceleration of 32.2 feet per second (approximately) meant a distance of 16 feet the first second (approximately) and—no! Approximations were not good enough. The figures had to be exact. But Plummer was trained to be exact.

And he knew that a heavy strongbox, dropped from the roof of the Talmadge Building at precisely the correct instant, would smash into the head of Josef Schissel on the sidewalk below with the velocity of a cannonball. Even if it were to hit only Schissel's shoulder or back it would most certainly kill him.

There was one further aspect of the problem that Plummer found intriguing. Schissel certainly wasn't going to just stand there and wait for the box to hit him. No, Schissel would be moving too. But this did not disturb Plummer. With the exception of the fact that the target as well as the "bomb" was in motion, these were the same calculations that bombardiers had performed over enemy factories. It was merely necessary to see that the target and the bomb collided at the same place at the same time.

From one of the secretaries on the fourteenth floor Plummer borrowed a stopwatch. Each day, just before the coffee break, he went to the roof and observed Schissel unloading his trays and urns, wheeling them around the corner of the building, and entering through the front door. The time it took Schissel to push the cart from his truck to the front entrance varied only because he was not always able to park his truck in the same place. Plummer began measuring the time from the moment Schissel passed a fire hydrant and he noted that the man could be depended on not to change his pace. His movements were as regular as clockwork.

The strongbox would be released to hit Schissel's head just as

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the man reached the corner of the building, since at that spot he cut the corner sharply, coming within two feet of the side of the building.

As a final step in his preparations Plummer managed "accidentally" to spill a blob of white paint on the sidewalk several yards down the alley from the corner. The spot had been chosen after several days of observation and calculations. When Schissel reached the blob of paint, the box would be dropped; Schissel would continue to walk ahead, and at the precise moment he arrived at the corner, the plummeting heavy metal box would have reached a point five feet six inches above the pavement. Finis.

And now Plummer had discovered that the Talmadge Building leaned two and seven-eighths inches to the south.

For a moment he wondered if it would be necessary to revise his entire plan. Then he shook his head. No, there was really no need for it. He would merely hold the box a bit farther out from the parapet before dropping it. A larger object than the box would, of course, be desirable in reducing the margin for error, but something heavy and yet small enough to be smuggled up to the roof was essential. The strongbox would do admirably. Besides, Plummer had another use for it.

Before dropping it on Schissel's head Plummer planned to fill the box with all the newspaper clippings he had saved concerning the German so the world might fully understand the reasons why he had to die.

The following day was rainy. The day after that a high wind sprang up early in the morning, and the same evening a gray mass of fog settled in, remaining for 48 hours. Plummer wondered if he would ever be able to put his murder plan into operation.

Friday morning arrived, sunny and cool and without a breath of wind. Looking through the window of his dingy room, Plummer smiled and hummed a happy tune to himself. It was a perfect day for walking with a girl in the park, for lying on the grass and watching the sky, for taking a trip to the country—and for murder.

Now that the time had come to carry out his plan, Plummer found himself curiously at ease. He whistled gaily at his image in the shaving mirror. He decided to skip breakfast, using the time instead to thumb through his thick packet of newspaper clippings for a last time. The earliest ones, dated April 1943, he handled gingerly. They were brittle with age but still quite readable. *Suspect Government Scientist of Sell-Out* read the one on the top of the pile.

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Replacing the clippings in their envelope, he crammed it into a jacket pocket and left the apartment. As he reached the sidewalk he remembered that he had forgotten to lock the door. He considered going back and then decided against it. There was nothing he possessed that was worth stealing.

He was six minutes late getting to work. In the basement of the Talmadge Building he went to his locker and changed into his blue coveralls, his mind on the steel strongbox waiting on a shelf of the broom closet on the fourteenth floor.

At 9:40 Plummer was on a stepladder, busily polishing the globes of the lights in a hallway on the fourteenth floor. Only 20 more minutes, he thought to himself. At ten o'clock. Then I'll put away the ladder in the closet, take the box, and go to the roof. Schissel will drive his truck up to the curb at 10:15, just as he always does. But he'll never make it to the front door. All these years I've spent waiting for this chance, and now there's just a few more minutes to—

"Plummer?"

It was Ed Malenski, who worked on the floor above. He must have come down the stairs; Plummer hadn't seen anyone get out of the service elevator. "Yeah, Ed," he answered.

"Dandridge wants to see you in his office right away. He couldn't reach you on the phone, so he called me and told me to let you know."

Jerome Dandridge was the head of the maintenance department of the Talmadge Building. Plummer supposed he was going to be reprimanded for being late. He didn't mind. Just as long as it didn't take too long. He rode the service elevator to the basement, got out, and knocked softly on the door of Dandridge's office.

"Come in." Plummer opened the door. Dandridge was sitting at his desk, and another man, conservatively dressed, stood beside him. The second man was a stranger to Plummer, and Dandridge made no attempt to introduce him.

"Mr. Dandridge, I'm sorry about being late, but—"

"That's not why I wanted to see you," Dandridge rumbled. "How long you been with us, Plummer?"

"About four months."

"And before that? What did you do before that?"

"Dishwasher—other things," Plummer replied. "It's all in my application. Why?"

Without answering, Dandridge turned to the other man, and picked up a paper from his desk. "Says here he never completed high school," he muttered. "What d'ya think, Mr. Ross?"

"Hard to tell," was the answer.

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"A long time has gone by since then. People change."

The man called Ross turned to Plummer. He reached into a pocket and pulled out a leather folder. "Mr. Plummer," he began, "I'm Joseph Ross. I'm with the F.B.I., and—"

Plummer was only half listening. Something had fallen from Ross's pocket when the agent had produced his identification. It was a small yellowed piece of paper with print on it. Automatically Plummer bent down to pick it up. His eyes widened. The black print screamed at him from the newspaper clipping.

Suspect Government Scientist of Sell-Out.

They knew who he was! It wasn't fair. Not today. Not after all these weeks of planning.

"No! Not now!" he shouted. Running to the office door he dashed through it, slamming it behind him. Across the hall was the service elevator, its doors open. He scurried inside and punched the button for the top floor. As the doors slid shut he had just time to see Ross and Dandridge burst out of the office in a vain attempt to halt the elevator.

The car rose swiftly to the twentieth floor. Plummer stepped into the corridor and looked around. It was empty. They were probably waiting in the basement for the indicator to show which floor he had stopped at. He had only a few seconds before—

Behind him the elevator doors closed and he could hear the car starting downward.

He ran to the stairway leading to the roof and pounded up the steps. Opening the thick door with his passkey, he moved out into the sunlight. Inserting the key into the outer lock he turned it hard in the wrong direction. The key snapped off. Perhaps that would be enough to jam the lock. To make doubly sure he inserted some small pieces of wood at the edges of the door, forcing them into place with the heel of his hand.

How much time? He glanced at his watch. Three minutes ten seconds before Schissel was scheduled to arrive. Please, please let the door to the roof hold for a few minutes. Just until he had enough time to drop—

The steel box! He had forgotten to take the box. It was still on the fourteenth floor, in the broom closet.

There had to be something else. A brick. That was it, a brick. He scanned the entire roof.

There was nothing but tiny scraps of wood which the slightest movement of air would blow off course. Even if they were to fall perfectly straight, Schissel would hardly feel them when they struck. He had to find something heavy.

There was nothing.

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Plummer heard a pounding on the door to the roof. The lock rattled, but the thick iron door remained closed. "Plummer! Open up!" called a muffled voice.

Far below he could see the sunlight glinting off the top of a panel truck as it moved up the alley at the side of the building. A tiny ant-like figure got out and opened the rear doors. The cart was piled high with trays. The coffee urns were put into place.

And in that instant Plummer found the weapon that would kill Schissel. It was one he should have thought of long ago—so much better than the strongbox. He removed the packet of clippings from his pocket and grasped them tightly in his hand.

Behind Plummer, Ross and Dandridge had managed to open the door a scant two inches before a wooden wedge at its base again jammed it. "Plummer, listen!" shouted Ross through the opening. "The army just located a report that Schissel sent to his superiors back in '43. That's why I'm here. It only landed on my desk two days ago and—"

But Plummer, deep in concentration, did not hear. Down below, Josef Schissel closed the doors of his truck and gripped the handle of his cart. He took a step forward—two—three—

"Open up, Plummer. The government's willing to do anything in its power to make amends. You're cleared! You're inno—"

The front wheels of Schissel's cart glided over a white paint stain on the sidewalk. The rear wheels followed. And then Schissel's right foot came down on the white spot.

With the soles of his heavy work shoes poised on the parapet 236½ feet above Schissel's head, Edmund Plummer folded his arms tightly across his chest, smiled through the tears streaming down his cheeks, and stepped off the parapet and out into space.

DON'T MISS

next month's 30th Anniversary Issue

(see page 161)

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

As you know, Edward D. Hoch has three entirely different series of mystery stories running in EQMM—a spy series (about Rand, the Double-C man), a crook-detective series (about Nick Velvet), and a homicide department series (about Captain Leopold). Here is the newest Leopold murder investigation, and like the other stories in this series the murder is decidedly not run-of-the-mill or of the garden variety...

END OF THE DAY

by EDWARD D. HOCH

SERGEANT FLETCHER POKED his head around the corner of Leopold's office doorway. "Captain, I have Mrs. Fleming here, if you can see her now."

"Send her in," Captain Leopold said. He turned to stare out the window at the warm June rain so that he would not have to see her face as she entered. There were moments when he hated his job, and this was one of them.

"Captain Leopold—"

He swiveled in his chair, seeing a blonde young woman of moderate good looks. He'd known Iris Fleming slightly, meeting her at department parties and civic functions. This morning she looked tired, and her finely chiseled face showed the lines of age that usually were hidden. "Yes, Mrs. Fleming, sit right down! Sorry to see you under such tragic circumstances."

"Is it true, what they say?"

"I'm afraid it is, Mrs. Fleming. Your husband shot and killed a man over on the Cross-County Expressway."

"Can I see him?"

Leopold shuffled the papers on his desk. "Certainly. But I wish you'd give me a few minutes first. Roger is a detective sergeant under my command. He has killed a person, apparently without any justification. That's bad for my

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department, bad for the entire police force."

"I'm sure Roger had a good reason for what he did."

"If he did, he hasn't told us yet. The dead man's car was parked off the road for some reason we haven't yet established. Your husband, who was off duty at the time, pulled off the road behind him. He walked over to the driver's side of the victim's car and fired two shots from his service revolver, apparently without even speaking to the other man. Several passing motorists saw the whole thing, and turned off the expressway to call the police. A patrol car reached the scene within five minutes and found your husband's car just pulling away. He offered no resistance, but he refused to talk about the killing."

"Are you so sure he did it?"

"In this case his silence is almost proof enough. His gun had been fired twice, and they're checking it in ballistics now. Several passing motorists identified him, and his car."

"Who's the man he's supposed to have killed?"

Leopold glanced at the report before him. "We don't have an identification yet. The car had Ohio license plates. Do you know anyone from Ohio?"

She shook her head. "No one. Perhaps Roger had seen this man committing a crime, and had chased him. Isn't that possible?"

"I'd like to think so, although it would hardly excuse his killing the man in cold blood. But there's been no report of a crime, and the dead man had no weapon on him."

"And Roger has said *nothing* about it?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Fleming. I'm hoping he'll talk to you. I'll go in with you, and then I'll leave you two alone."

He escorted her down the back hall to the little Interrogation Room where Detective Sergeant Roger Fleming, smoking a cigarette, sat at the scarred wooden table. Leopold, Fletcher, and Fleming had conducted a hundred or more interrogations in this room over the past few years, and now for the first time, facing Fleming across the table, Leopold realized the utter loneliness of the place. The walls were bare except for a framed photograph of the President which concealed a tiny microphone. The table and four chairs were the room's only furnishings.

"Hello, Roger," Leopold said. It was the first time he'd seen the man since his arrest.

"Hello, Captain. Sorry about all this." He turned to his wife then, hugging her in silence and sighing softly as he finally released her.

"Do you want to make a statement, Roger?"

"No, sir."

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"Why did you do it? Why in hell did you do it?"

"I have nothing to say, Captain. I'm sorry."

"Was there some trouble on the highway? Something that angered you?"

Fleming merely stared at him in silence. "All right," Leopold sighed at last. "I'll leave you two alone. Mrs. Fleming, try and talk some sense into your husband."

"Thank you, Captain."

As Leopold reached the door, Roger Fleming motioned toward the picture on the wall. "Is the bug on?" he asked.

"No," Leopold answered. "I owe you that much."

Sergeant Fletcher was down in the police garage, going over the victim's car. He glanced up as Leopold approached, turning off the small portable vacuum cleaner he'd been using on the seats.

"Find anything?" Leopold asked, frowning at the car as if somehow it was the cause of the day's woes.

"It's hot, Captain. It was stolen last night from a salesman staying at the Charles Motel."

"Damn!" Leopold kicked a tire in anger. "So why in hell didn't he just say he shot a car thief?"

"Beats me, Captain."

"You know him better than I do, Fletcher. What makes him tick? What's behind that bland face of his?"

"I don't really know him. I'd have a beer with him once or twice a month, but lately we haven't even done that."

"Did he get along with his wife?"

"As far as I know. They've got a couple of kids, in grammar school."

"What about the dead man? Any make on him yet?"

"His wallet was gone, but we found a tailor's tag inside his sleeve. Name is Norman Rossiter, a C.P.A. Got an office in the Grant Building."

"A C.P.A. and he stole a car?"

Fletcher shrugged. "They're human like anyone else. Why not?"

"The usual motives for car theft are joy riding or simple financial gain. Rossiter wouldn't seem to fit either one."

"But at least he's a local guy, so maybe Roger knew him after all."

"Let's go up and ask his wife," Leopold suggested.

"I'll be along in a few minutes—soon as I finish vacuuming. The lab boys are shorthanded today."

Leopold found Iris Fleming sitting in his office, nervously smoking a cigarette. "Did he tell you anything, Mrs. Fleming?"

"No, and frankly I've never seen him quite like this. He just kept telling me not to worry, reassuring me that everything

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would be all right. I asked him who the man from Ohio was, and he just wouldn't answer."

"The man wasn't from Ohio," Leopold told her. "The car was stolen. As near as we can tell, the dead man was a local accountant named Norman Rossiter."

That was when Iris Fleming fainted.

Sergeant Fletcher looked depressed, but not half so depressed as Leopold felt. By noon the temperature outside had climbed back into the eighties, where it had been all week, and the humid warmth of the city seemed to hang like a mist over Leopold's office.

"A simple triangle," Fletcher snorted. "She was having an affair with Rossiter and Roger found out. We have 'em every week of the year, and this one is no different."

"That seems to be it," Leopold agreed. "She admitted as much. The Ohio plates threw her off, so she never gave a thought to Roger having possibly killed Rossiter. She didn't even realize that Roger knew about it—their affair, I mean."

"He knew, all right."

Leopold patted the moisture on his brow. "When are they supposed to air condition this place?"

Fletcher shrugged. "It got cut out of the budget again this year." He started to take out a cigarette, then changed his mind. "But why didn't Roger just tell us the whole story?"

"Who knows?" The Captain looked at the list of duty assignments. "He would have been on duty till midnight, and we know he killed Rossiter just before two this morning. That gave him two hours, almost, to track the man down. Where was Roger just before he went off duty?"

Fletcher checked through the morning reports. "Investigating a knifing on Alamanda Street. Family trouble."

"He had family trouble himself."

"He sure did, Captain."

The phone on Leopold's desk buzzed and he answered. "Leopold here."

"Captain, this is Doc Hayes over at the Medical Examiner's office. We've finished with the man killed over on the Expressway."

"Rossiter. Yes?"

"That his name? Well, anyway, I wish you'd drop over. A couple of things of interest."

Doc Hayes was the acting medical examiner while the regular man was on a well-earned vacation. He was a grim little doctor who did his job well and never joked. Leopold admired his efficiency even while thinking he might have been better off teaching at some medical school.

He rose from his desk, all business, as Leopold entered. "Do

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you want to see the deceased, Captain?"

"Is it necessary?"

"No. I can summarize my findings." He cleared his throat. "The deceased was shot twice by Sergeant Fleming's revolver—ballistics has verified this. One of the bullets entered the left temple, lodging in the brain, while the other shattered the jawbone and passed through the body, lodging in the padded window frame on the right side of the car. I understand that slug was mashed up a bit, but they managed an identification."

"What about your findings, Doc?" Leopold asked, growing impatient. He could read the ballistics report later.

"Well, it's funny the people on the scene didn't notice, but of course it was a warm night."

"Notice what?"

Doc Hayes sighed and glanced around the little office—as if he were looking for a blackboard to continue his lecture. "When a person dies, the force of gravity causes the blood to seep to the body's lowest points. The wounds in Rossiter's head and jaw bled hardly at all, because there was very little blood left in the upper portion of his body by that time. As I say, if it hadn't been such a warm night, rigor mortis would have set in faster and the condition would have been more obvious from the outset."

"Look, Doc, are you trying to tell me that—"

"That the man was already dead for at least two hours when Sergeant Fleming shot him. He'd been killed by a wound from a thin-bladed knife that went between his ribs and straight into the heart."

Leopold went back to his office and told Sergeant Fletcher what he'd learned. Fletcher simply stared at him with widened eyes. "You mean the guy was murdered *twice?*"

"In a manner of speaking," Leopold said. "I don't know if I should feel elated or depressed. It gets Fleming off the hook, but it gives us an unsolved case."

"What now?"

"Get Fleming up here. Maybe he'll be willing to talk now."

A few minutes later Roger Fleming sat in the chair opposite Leopold's desk. "Could I have a cigarette?" he asked.

"Bad for your health," Leopold said, tossing over a pack. "You ready to talk yet?"

"No."

"Suppose I told you Rossiter was already dead when you pumped two bullets into his head."

There was a flicker of something—fear?—across Fleming's otherwise impassive face. He drew slowly on the cigarette and said finally, "I appreciate your

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seeing me here in your office rather than in the Interrogation Room, Captain."

"That's all you've got to say?"

"That's all."

"Look, Roger, you may be off the hook on the murder charge, but you're finished with the police force unless you change your attitude pretty damn quick. The dead man was having an affair with Iris—that much we already know. If you didn't kill him, who did? Who beat you to it, Roger?"

"What time was he killed?"

"A little before midnight, according to Doc Hayes."

"I was still on duty then, investigating a knifing."

"We know that, Roger. But we want you to tell us what you did after midnight."

Roger Fleming sighed and looked at his hands. "I drove out along the expressway until I saw his car parked. Then I went over and shot him twice through the open window."

"How'd you know he was there? How'd you know which car? The car was stolen."

"God, Captain!" Fleming buried his face in his hands. That was his only answer.

"All right," Leopold sighed. "We'll see how long we can hold you for questioning before your lawyer springs you. When you decide to cooperate and tell a straight story you know how to reach me."

After Fleming had been taken back to his cell, Leopold buzzed for Fletcher. "I want you to check out Rossiter's movements for all of last night. Then I want you to do the same on Iris Fleming."

"You think she killed him and Roger's shielding her?"

"At this point I don't know what to think."

Fletcher watched him slip into his rumpled suitcoat. "Where can I reach you if I need to, Captain?"

"I'll be down on Alamanda Street, investigating Roger Fleming's last case."

"His last case?"

"Just before midnight he was working on a stabbing. And just before midnight Norman Rossiter was stabbed to death. Funny coincidence—if you believe in coincidences."

Alamanda Street wandered across the backside of the downtown area. It was a section of floppy gray houses and tiny yards crisscrossed by well-worn paths. Now, in the early afternoon of a late June day, an assortment of noisy children were playing in the yard of the house that Leopold sought.

The woman who answered the door was a big-boned Puerto Rican with a light skin. He showed her his badge. "Leopold of Homicide. I'm here about last night's trouble."

"Wasn't no homicide here," the

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woman protested. "Just a little knifing, that's all."

"You're the landlady here?"

"That's me. Mrs. Sanchez. But there was no homicide."

"Who got knifed?"

She gestured upstairs. "Mrs. Croft stuck a knife in her husband. Hurt him bad, but didn't kill him."

"The detective came and investigated?"

"Sure."

"Do you remember his name?"

She thought for a moment. "Like that mystery writer—Fleming, that was it. Sergeant Fleming. Good-looking, fairly young."

"How long was he here?"

"Oh, gosh, a couple of hours. He turned Mrs. Croft over to the patrol car and then he went around questioning all the neighbors. It was after midnight when I saw him get in his car and drive away."

Leopold nodded. Fleming was always a conscientious worker, willing to put in overtime without grumbling. He sighed and wished he had a cigarette with him. There was nothing to connect the knifing of Mr. Croft with the knifing of Norman Rossiter. "Thank you, Mrs. Sanchez," he said, and went out to his car.

He drove around in the afternoon sunshine, trying to get his bearings. It was only a few blocks to the Charles Motel, and the expressway was only a few blocks farther on. He drove to the motel and looked over the parking area, but there was nothing to see. Anyone could have stolen the Ohio salesman's car. Rossiter himself could have stolen it.

But why? It was a nagging point.

He drove out to the little ranch house where the Flemings lived, and found Iris Fleming playing with the children in the back yard. When she saw Leopold, her face clouded over and she sent the children off to their swings and climbing poles.

"Sorry to bother you again," he said.

"Not at all. Roger just called. He says he expects to be released by tonight. Is that true?"

"Quite possibly. The medical report says that Rossiter was already dead when your husband shot him."

"Oh. Then Roger is innocent!"

"Innocent of murder. But still guilty of enough to get him kicked off the force. Tell me, did Rossiter have any enemies you know of?"

"You're asking me?" Her eyes were all innocence.

"Come off it, Mrs. Fleming," he said with deliberate roughness. "You and Rossiter were having an affair. You admitted that much to us after you fainted this morning."

"But I knew nothing of Norman's business affairs. Perhaps he was an accountant for a gambling

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syndicate, or for some tax evader who had to silence him."

"Perhaps. Fletcher is checking those angles now."

"Then why are you here?" she asked with a sweet smile that didn't quite make it.

"If Roger didn't kill Rossiter, you become suspect Number Two."

"So it's like that."

He nodded. "Like that. Where were you just before midnight?"

"Home with the children."

"They were awake?"

"At midnight? Of course not."

"Then you could have left them for a while."

"I wouldn't have done that."

"But you could have. At this stage I'm only interested in the possibilities, Mrs. Fleming."

She got to her feet and started for the house. "When you have a warrant you can come back and question me some more, Captain. Until that time I'll be indisposed."

He sighed and went back to the car. There was no sense arguing with her. He could take her downtown for questioning, but there was not a shred of evidence against her. He drove back downtown, avoiding the front entrance to headquarters where reporters would be waiting.

The whole case was beginning to pull apart—like a flimsy kite in a windstorm—and he had the distinct feeling that soon he would be left with only the ruins of his department.

Sergeant Fletcher came back just before dinnertime. He was hot and unhappy, and he wanted to go home. "There's nothing in Rossiter's business or personal life," he assured Leopold. "He was clean—except for Mrs. Fleming."

"That the best you could do after an afternoon's digging? What about his clients?"

"The United Fund, the Red Cross, the Music Association—stuff like that. Not a shady character in the lot."

"All right," Leopold said. "What about the weapon? Anyone find the knife?"

Fletcher shook his head. "I had men out searching where the car was parked, and of course we went over the car itself."

"I suppose he wasn't killed on the expressway. The killer drove him there and pushed him behind the wheel and left him. The knife could be anywhere."

"That could be it, Captain." He started to leave and then remembered something. "I've got David Thorn outside. Want to see him?"

"Who?"

"Thorn. The salesman whose car was stolen."

Leopold nodded. "Send him in." There was always an angle to be checked. Thorn and Rossiter

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might have met in a bar, got into a violent quarrel, and Thorn might have stabbed him and then lied about the car having been stolen. There had been a case like that a few years earlier.

"Sit down, Mr. Thorn. This won't take long."

David Thorn was tall and almost handsome. But he was just about over the hill—hair thin to the point of baldness, pouch beginning to show up front. The easy life at middle age.

"Just who are you a salesman for, Mr. Thorn?"

"Ritto Products. School supplies, teaching machines. We're coming out with a low-priced copying machine in the fall."

"Isn't this the wrong time of year for it?"

"On the contrary, this is when they buy for the fall semester."

"Ever call on accountants?"

"No."

Leopold grunted. It had been a passing idea, no more. "What about your car that was stolen, Mr. Thorn? When did you notice it missing?"

"I didn't. Not until the police phoned and woke me up this morning to ask about it. They'd traced the license number through Ohio and found out from my wife where I was staying here."

"It was taken from the motel parking lot?"

"That's right. Last night I drove around town and went to an early movie. I was back in my motel room by ten thirty."

"So it was taken some time after that."

The salesman nodded his balding head. He seemed eager enough to cooperate, and Fletcher said, "Show the Captain your mileage record, Mr. Thorn."

"Oh, yes! I almost forgot. I keep this for tax purposes." He pulled out a little notebook and flipped through the ruled pages. "The odometer reading was 11,362 when I parked it last night."

Sergeant Fletcher flipped open his own book. "And when it was found on the expressway the odometer read 11,369. The car was driven seven miles after it was stolen."

Leopold nodded. "I see what you mean. The distance from the motel to the expressway is only a little over one mile. So the car was driven somewhere else first."

Fletcher nodded. "Now if only we knew where."

"How about Rossiter's apartment?"

"I'll check it."

Leopold rose and shook hands with Thorn. "Thank you for your cooperation, sir. We'll need your car just a little longer to complete some tests, and then it will be released to you."

He saw the man to the door and went back to his desk. After a while Fletcher returned. "The

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newspapers want a statement, Captain. They want to know if it's true we're releasing Fleming."

"Sergeant Fleming will be released from custody this evening, but he still faces departmental charges."

"If we announce that, we have to tell the papers that Rossiter was already dead."

"Go ahead. The real killer knows it anyway."

Fletcher nodded. Then, after a moment, he asked, "Captain, why do you think the killer left the car on the expressway? It's a wonder somebody didn't pull up and find the body right away. Whoever left the car had to run through the grass and hop a five-foot fence to get away."

"Unless there was another car."

"Two people?"

"It's happened before."

Fletcher thought about that. "Maybe Rossiter didn't realize how badly he was hurt. Maybe he drove that far alone, on his own, and then suddenly pulled over on the shoulder and died. You said the wound was a narrow one."

"Narrow, but straight into the heart. He didn't drive anywhere after that."

Fletcher looked unhappy, reflecting Leopold's mood. It was a black eye for the department, no matter how you looked at it, and with each hour they seemed to be drawing further away from a solution. "I never saw a case like it," Leopold grumbled. "At the start it was solved, and now it's unsolved and we're nowhere."

"Do you want to see Fleming again before he's released?"

Leopold considered for a few moments. "Yes. And get his wife back here. I want some answers from both of them."

"Right, Captain. Oh, by the way, I checked a city map. Rossiter's apartment is just under three miles from the Charles Motel."

"Good. Get over there and search the place. Look for signs of a struggle, a bloody knife, anything."

"Why would somebody kill him there and then cart him off to the expressway?"

"I don't know. But I want to find out if that's what really happened."

Leopold had been alone for another ten minutes when a uniformed patrolman poked his head into the office. "Ah, Captain?"

"Yes?"

"I'm Officer Abbot. I patrol the expressway nights—the expressway and that end of the city."

Leopold came alert. "Yes?" The man obviously had something to say, but still he hesitated. "What's it about—the Rossiter murder?"

"Well, it might be, Captain."

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"Get to the point."

"We had a call about one o'clock—somebody reported a body on the expressway."

"At one this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Man or woman?"

"The officer who took the call couldn't be sure. Husky voice. Anyway, they dispatched my car to have a look. I only went to the city line, of course, and I didn't see any body. So I reported that it must have been a crank call and forgot about it. Gosh, Captain, we get crank calls all the time! One night they told me there was a flying saucer landed out there, with men from outer space!"

Leopold leaned across the desk. "Are you telling me that the car with Rossiter's body wasn't there at one o'clock?"

Officer Abbot seemed to shrivel. "No, Captain. It was there, all right, because I remember seeing it. But I was looking for a body *on* the road—I thought that's what the caller had meant! I saw the car, and the guy sitting behind the steering wheel, and I remembered thinking that I'd go back and check him out if I didn't find anything. It wasn't too unusual, though, because that time of night drivers are always pulling over to doze for a few minutes. He was off the road, not harming anybody. Anyway, I got another call and didn't go back."

"You're sure it was the murder car?"

"I remember the Ohio plates." He quickly added, "It hadn't been reported stolen then."

"All right," Leopold said. "Thanks for telling me now anyway."

"Does it help any, Captain?"

"Maybe."

Alone once more, Leopold stared out at the city and thought about the case. Here and there, lights were beginning to come on in office buildings, although darkness was still two hours away. He picked up Fleming's personnel file and stared hard at the photo of the man he'd worked with for so many years.

Roger Fleming, detective sergeant.

Then, after a time, he knew what he had to do.

The lights were on in his office when Roger Fleming appeared at the door. He cleared his throat and waited until Leopold looked up, then said, "They're letting me go, but I understood you wanted to see me first."

"Yes, Roger. Sit down, will you?" Leopold motioned to a chair. "Iris is on her way here too. I just wanted to ask a few final questions."

"Iris?" He frowned nervously. "Why drag her into it again?"

"She's into it already, Roger. We know about her relationship

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with the murdered man."

Sergeant Fletcher came in then, looking tired. It had been a long day for them all. He dropped into the other chair with a sigh. "Still hot out there. Isn't cooling off a bit."

"Did you examine the apartment?"

Fletcher nodded. "Nothing there. No sign of a weapon."

The phone buzzed, announcing Iris Fleming, and Leopold ordered her sent in. She too looked tired, and hadn't bothered to renew her eye makeup. It was the end of the day for all of them.

"Are you ready to go home?" she asked her husband.

"I'm ready."

Leopold cleared his throat, hating what he had to do. "One moment, please. As you know, Roger, you still face departmental charges. You attempted murder, and the fact that your victim was already dead does not greatly alter the situation from the department's point of view. I think I can safely say that you're finished as a detective."

"I suppose so," Fleming mumbled.

"And there's more, because we still have a case to close. There's still the real murderer of Norman Rossiter to be brought to justice."

"Have you found him?" Roger Fleming asked.

"I think so." Leopold leaned back in his chair, trying to keep his eyes off Iris Fleming. "You wouldn't tell us how you knew the car was parked there on the expressway, but of course there's only one way you could have known—only one way, Roger, you could know just where to find Rossiter at two in the morning. And that's if the real murderer told you. But if the murderer told you that Rossiter was in the car on the expressway, not going anywhere, you must also have known he was dead—or at least dying. It doesn't make sense any other way."

"What are you driving at?" Iris asked.

"Only that Roger must have known Rossiter was dead or dying when he fired those shots. Which means he didn't fire them to *kill* Rossiter. He fired them to protect the real murderer. What person would have told him about the killing, told him where to find the car? Who was he trying to protect by taking the blame on himself? No one but his wife. You, Iris. You killed your lover."

"No!" Her hand had flown to her mouth.

Leopold turned back to Roger. "The deception is over, Roger. You can't shield her any longer."

Roger Fleming, his face white as chalk, slowly nodded. "You're right, of course. I thought I could take the blame on myself. You're right. Yes, she killed him."

It was then that Iris moved,

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springing like a tigress. She screamed and leaped at her husband, clawing at his face.

Fletcher was closest. He grabbed her around the waist and hung on.

Leopold gazed out over the city, seeing only the night lights now. It had been a long hard day, and his vision tended to blur a bit when he was overtired.

"We've got her calmed down at last," Fletcher said from the door. "God, she was like a madwoman!"

Leopold nodded. "She had reason to be."

Roger Fleming was still in his chair. He hadn't moved since her outburst. Now he started to rise. "I'd better be getting home. The children—"

Leopold said nothing. He opened a drawer in his desk and took out one of the familiar manila envelopes they all used to store evidence. He unclasped it and tipped it upside down. There was a clatter as a narrow-bladed kitchen knife fell out and hit the desk.

Roger Fleming turned his eyes on it, as if seeing it for the first time. "What's that?" he asked.

"The weapon that killed Norman Rossiter. Also the weapon that Mrs. Croft used to stab her husband. I thought you'd have the decency to confess when I accused Iris, but you played it to the bitter end, didn't you?"

"You're accusing me again?"

"Roger, Roger, why in hell did you do it? A smart cop like you, and you let yourself get into a mess like this! Was it worth it, just to kill your wife's lover?"

"I was on duty when Rossiter was killed," he said, but his voice was beginning to crack. "I've got an alibi!"

"Your alibi isn't worth beans, Roger. The lab tests will show two different blood types on this knife blade, and when we start pinning down your exact movements before midnight, we'll find some pretty big gaps. You were called to the investigation of the Croft stabbing, and you found yourself suddenly in a perfect situation for yourself. You had a murder weapon which had already been used for one stabbing, and an hour's time or more for establishing an alibi. After all, what better place to hide a murder weapon than with the evidence of a totally different crime?"

Roger Fleming stirred and glanced at Fletcher, whose face was impassive. They'd both gone through these final moments with Leopold so many times that now it seemed unreal with Fleming as the accused. Finding him at the car with a gun was one thing, but revealing him as a carefully calculating killer was something much more sinister.

"Supposedly you spent nearly two hours questioning neighbors

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of the Crofts," Leopold continued, "which was a long time for a simple family-trouble call. That made me suspicious from the start, and then I discovered that the Charles Motel was within walking distance of the Croft place. You talked to a few neighbors, then left your car parked where it was and walked to the motel. You stole the salesman's car, drove to Rossiter's apartment, killed him with the same knife that Mrs. Croft had used, and then drove the dead body to the expressway. You left it there, hopped the fence, and walked back to the Croft place—a distance of only a mile. The neighbors thought you'd been there all the time, questioning people."

"Why did he leave the body on the expressway?" Fletcher asked. "I don't understand that part. And why did he go back to it two hours later?"

"That was the key to the whole case. The body was left on the expressway simply so that it would be quickly found—soon enough to make Roger's alibi still valid. As a detective himself, he was well aware of autopsy results, and of the fact that the longer a body goes undiscovered the harder it is to fix the precise time of death.

"He figured someone would stop and find the body right away, but nobody did. Cars kept passing and nobody stopped. You must have sweated out that hour, Roger, back at headquarters waiting for the report that never came in. You had to establish Rossiter's death as before midnight, in order to be in the clear. You couldn't hang around headquarters all night being seen by people."

"Why didn't he report the body himself?" Fletcher asked.

"He finally did, around one this morning. I just learned that a short time ago. A call came in about a body on the expressway, but no car was mentioned and the investigating officer didn't find Rossiter. By two o'clock you must have been really desperate, Roger. There was nobody around to alibi you at that time of the morning, and even the bars were closing. You had no place to go for an alibi. In fact, there was a good chance now that the body wouldn't be discovered till morning, and your original alibi would be useless.

"You couldn't pretend to stumble on it yourself, since you were the chief suspect. So you decided on a bizarre and bold plan. You drove out to the stolen car on the expressway, waited till some cars were passing, and fired two shots into Rossiter's dead body. From your police experience you knew it could be shown later that Rossiter was already dead. Rather than place yourself in danger, you actually

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made sure that the real time of death could be established to clear you."

"Couldn't he just break the guy's wrist watch?" Fletcher asked.

"Would something like that have convinced you? Or the Medical Examiner?"

"No," Fletcher admitted, "but this way he ruined his whole police career."

"At two o'clock this morning the choice was between his career and his life. It wasn't a difficult choice to make, was it, Roger? It wasn't even difficult to shift the blame onto Iris. After all, she'd betrayed you with Rossiter."

Fleming's lips were dry. "How'd you get onto it?"

"You knew where the car was. Rossiter didn't tell you—he was already dead for two hours. If Iris told you, you'd have tried to hide the body, not take the blame on yourself. And if she didn't tell you, the only way you could have known was if *you* drove it there, if *you* killed him."

"You'll have a tough time proving it," Fleming said.

"Not with this bloody knife."

"Maybe Rossiter and Mr. Croft both had the same blood type."

Leopold smiled. "Feel like gambling your life on it, Roger?"

He didn't feel like gambling. On the way back to his cell he grabbed a gun from the holster of a friendly guard and shot himself in the head.

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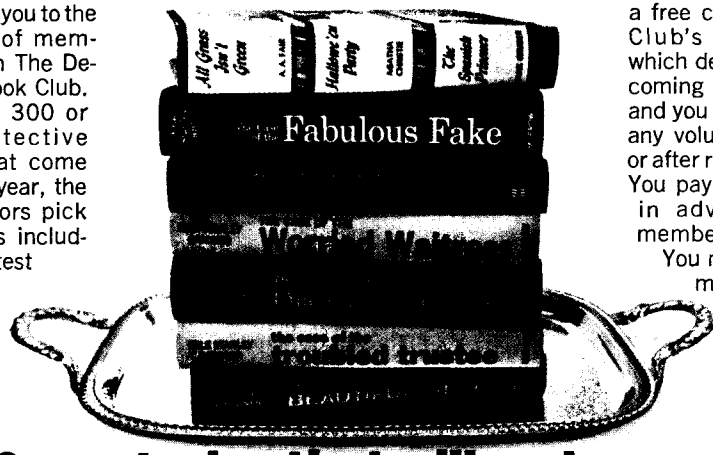

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